

# Silven Trumpeter

Volume 4 • Issue 3 • Autumn 2006

**Gen Con 2006**

**80+ pages of coverage and news  
inside this issue!**



**Cards and  
Miniatures  
Anyone?**



## FEATURE STORY:

**Gen Con indepth  
coverage**

**Monte Cook interview**  
page 8

**An extensive look at  
freelancing**  
page 12

**Exclusive inside look  
at Spookybeans**  
page 29

**and more...**

**Articles**

**Reviews**

**Fiction**

**Interviews**

**and exclusive previews  
of upcoming Silven  
Publishing products!**

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SILVEN  
PUBLISHING



# Editor's Note

Autumn 2006

In some ways, it seems like Gen Con was just yesterday. Part of it comes from the nonstop work it took for the Silven Press Team to put this awesome issue together. (Another part of it, admittedly, comes from the piles of Gen Con swag still lying around my apartment!)

But that's what this issue features: tons of coverage of Gen Con. We've taken a team of reporters, photographers, editors, and even one weird guy who plays CCGs, and we've covered what we think is the best that Gen Con had to offer. We checked out new games and checked in with old favorites. We got the scoop on news and upcoming products from our favorite publishers. We enjoyed the entertainment and learned a whole lot from all the seminars available. We even tried to get someone to ride a Segway, but there just wasn't time.

You can meet our press team on page 59!

We also found out that there just wasn't time to get everything done after Gen Con, either. We had so much material we brought home with us that there is no way we could have gotten it all read and transcribed and done in time for this issue. So look for a few more articles next issue, plus a whole lot of interviews and reviews of brand-new products!

But that's not all. Even with all the stuff we've done for Gen Con, we still have plenty of your favorites from the *Trumpeter* staff. The Silven Bestiary, the Spell Bazaar, game material and fiction from new writers, and even the return of Through the Lens of History.

Whether you made it to Gen Con and want to revisit, you want to read about a seminar you didn't make it to, you didn't make it and want to get in on the action, or if you couldn't care less and just want the normal *Trumpeter*, this issue is for you. So kick back, relax, and enjoy.

I know I will!

Cheers!

Elizabeth R.A. Liddell  
Editor-in-Chief  
*Silven Trumpeter*





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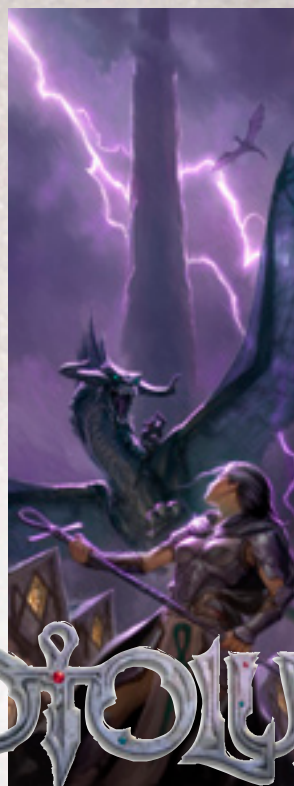
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# Wanted!

Contributors for the Silven Trumpeter

We're looking for talented writers to contribute their skills to our ezine. We don't require anything beyond a good idea and good writing to back it up. You don't have to have published credits – in fact, we're a great place to get that “first publication” experience. Of course, if you're an industry veteran, we'll be happy to hear from you as well.

## What We Want

The Silven Trumpeter publishes fiction, d20 and other OGL game material, advice for GMs and players, commentary on in the industry, interviews with publishers and designers, and much more. Chances are, if you have a good idea, we'll find a way to get it into an issue.

## What's in it for You?

Pay for standard articles is \$10.00 per piece, payment within 90 days of publication. We also publish your name right along with your work, providing you with a background of publication to “break in” to the industry. We pair you with an editor to polish your work, giving you the experience of working with an editorial staff. You will also retain all the rights of publication of your work; we ask only for the right of first publication.

## How do you Get Involved?

Get your ideas together and send an article proposal to our Editor-in-Chief, Elizabeth R.A. Liddell (Lyz@SilvenPublishing.com). Be sure to include all the requested parts of your proposal, and check with the proposal deadlines to see the best times for submission. Once your proposal has been accepted, you'll usually have about two weeks to complete and submit the article.

## Include in Your Proposal

1. Your name and email address
2. A short description of the article you'd like to write, 50-100 words in length.
3. Ideas for artwork to accompany the article.
4. A short background on yourself providing your writing experience and/or experience in the field you're writing in.
5. A 50-75 word bio of yourself, to accompany the article in the issue.
6. A short writing sample that you feel adequately demonstrates your style and skill. This can be part of the article you're proposing or a term paper – anything that demonstrates your writing.

## Proposal Submission Schedule

Winter 2006 Issue (December release)

Proposals Due: ~~October 15~~ **November 6!**

Spring 2007 Issue (March release)

Proposals Due: January 15

Summer 2007 Issue (June release)

Proposals Due: April 15

Fall 2007 Issue (September release)

Proposals Due: July 15\*

\*Contact the Editor-in-Chief by this date if you will be in attendance at Gen Con Indy and would like to participate as



# NPCyclopedia Psionics

by Eytan Bernstein, Matthew J. Hansen and Sean Holland



All in all, this book is an excellent choice for a DM seeking to use psionics in their game.

All of the psionic classes and races are used, along with other characters that are at least tangentially psionic in nature, the rules are finely tuned and presented very insightfully, and the new material is superb.

NPCyclopedia: Psionics is a book where its presentation is eclipsed only by its usefulness.

Shane O'Connor - RPGnow





# Ptolus

## Monte Cook and his City by the Spire

by Elizabeth R.A. Liddell

Shortly before Gen Con 2005, Monte Cook announced his next product: the biggest, most deluxe product to ever hit the RPG market. That product is *Ptolus: Monte Cook's City by the Spire*, and after a year of anticipation, it was finally released at this year's Gen Con.

The *Silven Trumpeter* covered the Chat with Malhavoc Press at the 2005 Gen Con and featured an exclusive preview of *Ptolus* in our March '06 issue. This year at Gen Con, we made a point to check out everything *Ptolus*-related we could get our hands on! We stopped by a lot of events at the Malhavoc Press area of the White Wolf booth, dutifully attended the Art of Urban Adventuring with Monte, and even got the chance to talk to him face to face about his impressive product.

The *Ptolus* book itself is a massive, 6.5-pound tome of 672 full-color pages. As if that weren't enough, it comes with a packet including a poster map, smaller maps and handouts, and a CD of an additional 400 pages of content related to the city by the spire. Those who preordered copies also received the adventure *Night of Dissolution*, five copies of *A Player's Guide to Ptolus*, and had their numbered copy of the book autographed by Monte.

Along with the release of this groundbreaking product, Monte made a startling announcement: He's bowing out of the RPG industry. You can read the announcement at [www.montecook.com/cgi-bin/page.cgi?mc\\_los\\_157](http://www.montecook.com/cgi-bin/page.cgi?mc_los_157). We got a chance to share a few words on what Monte has planned next, so read on.

### ***Ptolus* Events at Gen Con**

Malhavoc Press planned several events at Gen Con around *Ptolus* and its release. Although Monte didn't run any of the sessions himself, quite a few "Welcome to Ptolus" RPG events were highly attended. At the Malhavoc Press area in the Exhibitors' Hall, Monte and Sue put on a contest: How Much Do You Want *Ptolus*? Monte also ran a two-hour session on the Art of Urban Adventuring, using *Ptolus* as a living example of how to best run a campaign in one city.

Artwork by Todd Lockwood, copyright Monte Cook.  
"Ptolus City by the Spire" is copyright Monte Cook.



We got the chance to talk to a few of the players from one of the Welcome to Ptolus events. Christopher Boyce is a big fan of Monte Cook, drawn by his appealing style of storytelling – he preordered *Ptolus* copy #987 out of 1,000! Chris Rowan had no knowledge of Malhavoc Press or *Ptolus* before the event, but had a good time nonetheless. They praised the adventure, with their only complaint being that it was on the short side. Both of them – as well as all players in the event – received poster maps of the city as a memento.

If you were near the Malhavoc Press spot in the Exhibitors' Hall at 1 p.m. Friday, you probably noticed the contest: How Much Do You Want *Ptolus*? Fifteen contestants were handed copies of the book with a simple challenge: Hold it straight out at chin level. Whoever holds it the longest gets to keep it!

Well, it sounded easy, but it sure wasn't! While the onlookers cheered them on, one contestant after another dropped out, their arms reduced to quivering blobs. Sean Nokes was finally awarded his book after holding it up for eight minutes 30 seconds – quite a feat! When asked to comment on his victory, he said, "Oh God, my arms are going to explode and fall off!"

The contest was so popular that it was repeated Saturday afternoon. This time, the final two competitors refused to lower their arms. Ultimately, they stood staring one another in the eye, crowds cheering, for a dramatic and draining 13 minutes five seconds! So astounded by their efforts, Monte and Sue decided to award Larry Solomon and Mike Ivey each a copy of the book that they both very clearly wanted!

## A Chat with Monte

Saturday morning, I got the chance to sit down for a comfortable chat with Monte about *Ptolus*, Malhavoc Press and his plans now that he's leaving the RPG industry he's been a part of for the past 18 years.

### How does it feel now that *Ptolus* is out?

It feels great. At every step along the way it kind of felt like the whole thing would fall apart, so it's good to know that it's out and nothing can go wrong!

**If we've been following the website, we've watched various stages of completion come around, but there's always been something more to do. Now it's out and you're actually *done*. What are you still doing?**

Just talking to people at this point. We're still doing website excerpts and enhancements, and we're continuing to support the Delver's Guild website.

**What's the actual pronunciation of the city? How do you pronounce it?**

So when I'm sitting around at my game table, the word that comes out of my mouth is "Tall-ess." When I started, it was "Toe-luss." I've heard Toe-less, and Tall-liss. Puh-tall-ess. I don't mind a little "p," but when it's PUH-tall-ess, that's a little much. And then the White Wolf guys have a bunch of jokes about

"Plahdess," but I've never heard anyone actually call it that. Really, people can call it whatever they want. It's their setting.

**AUDIO INSERT:** Listen to Monte himself pronounce and mispronounce the city of Ptolus! [Click here.](#)

### Has it been successful?

I think so. We brought about 400 copies to Gen Con, and it's Saturday morning and we've sold about two-thirds of them. There were about 1,000 preorders. And then it goes into distribution and the game stores get it. We really appreciate the people who have been willing to support us and preorder and buy the book sight unseen, but I think it's the kind of book where you have to see it. I kind of think that despite all the nice things that have happened, we're really going to see the people get excited about it *now*.

**Is it going to go through the normal distribution chains? Will we see *Ptolus* in Borders or other large bookstores where we've seen some other Malhavoc products?**

Probably not. Since [*Ptolus*] is a big expensive book, it's hard on the hobby retailers when you sell in the channels that allow for people to do big discounts. What we're trying to do, to support game stores, is to make it available only at hobby stores. Anyone can buy from a hobby channel, although they can't buy at a *huge* discount, but places like Borders and stuff, with the exception of individual stores, probably aren't used to ordering from hobby store distributors. So you probably won't see a lot in bookstores. There are a few that cater to a game audience [such as stores in areas lacking a Friendly Local Game Store], and those stores might carry it.



The *Ptolus* book, plus all the goodies that come with it!

**Has anyone who preordered a copy of Ptolus (and thus received a signed copy) come up to you and asked for it to be signed again?**

Yes. Well, what I started to do when I was doing the preorder signing, was when the process would start to get slowed down (it was a kind of assembly line process thing, with me signing and Sue numbering), I would do weird little doodles in the margins, of stick-figure beholders and stuff like that. And so people have been coming up to me, for whatever reason, and asking me for their own doodles.

**Have you gotten any feedback on Ptolus?**

On Thursday, people were just kind of seeing the book for the first time, or they'd say their preorder came just before they came to Gen Con, and they hadn't had a chance to look at it yet. But then [Friday], the people who bought or picked it up on Thursday are coming back and saying they'd read through part of it (although no one came back and said they'd read through the whole thing!), so they've said some really great things. It's always nice to have someone say "Oh, this book looks wonderful," but to have someone who's actually read a big part of it to come back and say they liked it, that's really a compliment.

**Have you gotten any negative feedback?**

No. Really, the only negative thing to some people is the price. Some people come up and look at it and say "Wow, this looks really nice, but I don't want to pay \$120 for it." And you know, that's OK with me. We knew going in that this wasn't going to be a book that everyone was going to want or need. So that's cool. I wish we could give everyone something that they wanted, but it's not possible.

**Is there anything you'd like to go back and change?**

Hard question. Not really. Maybe that answer sounds really arrogant, and maybe that answer will change soon, but right now I'm so happy with it, almost more than anything I've worked on.

**Is there anything you've had to leave out?**

Well, yes and no. There are a lot of things that happened in the Ptolus campaign that aren't in the book. And there's more every day, because the Ptolus campaign is still going. But really, there isn't a whole lot that got left out of this book, because the whole idea was to make this book as complete as possible. So really, if there was something that I thought was supposed to be in the book, it went in the book. That's part of the reason the book kept growing. For the longest time it was going to be a 500-something page book, then it was 640, and then at the last minute it went up to 672.

**So this is really everything there is to know about Ptolus?**

It's everything I think a GM needs. There's also the Delver's Guild stuff, which is cool, but not as necessary. Really, Ptolus is

a city of 75,000 people, so in theory we could stat out each and every one of them, but that isn't necessary, nor do I think it's really desirable.

**Is Ptolus open source? Will other people be able to write adventures and supplements for it?**

It uses the OGL, but the proprietary info of the setting is not open in any way. While we have made things available so that people could do adventures for *Iron Heroes* and *Arcana Evolved*, we're actually probably not going to do that for Ptolus. We're going to keep Ptolus a little closer to the source.

For *Arcana Evolved*, we have [basically] a mini-d20 license, which allows you to use anything in the book, with no licensing fee or anything. *Iron Heroes* we've made available to certain game publishers to create material for it.

**What are you and Malhavoc Press doing now?**

Well, Malhavoc is going to keep all our major titles in print. We just reprinted *The Book of Eldritch Might*, and we're in the process of compiling errata so that we can do a brand-new printing of *Arcana Evolved*. So those kinds of things we're going to keep around, because we want to keep supporting the people who have supported us.

There isn't going to be anything really new going on in the foreseeable future. As far as Malhavoc goes, a year from now I might get a hankering to do an adventure or something. It might come out only as a PDF, or it might come out as a print product, I don't really know. That'll probably be on a case-by-case basis.

**You're working on a few projects, a novel that we know about and one last "mystery" RPG that hasn't been announced yet. Can you tell us anything about that?**

Well, apparently White Wolf has announced that it is from them, but I can't really say anything else about it.

**What's Sue going to be doing?**

Well, that's probably a better question to ask her. In the short term, Sue's going to just take a break, because we've both been working ourselves to death, and we need a break. Sue especially, I think.

**Is there anything you'd like to add to the world at large?**

I guess I'd want to say in particular to all the people who preordered it, how much I appreciate that sort of faith. You're buying a book that you've never seen for \$120. So I really appreciate that, it was kind of an overwhelming show of support. We had no idea how many preorders we were expecting. *Ptolus* was always a risk – would anyone want it and be willing to pay for that kind of product, or even can it be done? Can you make a book that big that doesn't fall apart? So I really appreciate that support.



# Spin a Yarn with Ed Greenwood

by Eytan Bernstein

One of the secret delights, the hidden guilty pleasures, the lewd and lascivious pastimes, and most certainly the most fun you'll probably have at Gen Con, is an innocuous sounding event titled "Spin a Yarn with Ed Greenwood."

A tradition for years, this event allows fans to let loose and combine their creative juices with the always uninhibited storytelling of Ed Greenwood. It's an event that most Realms' fans try never to miss – unless, of course, they happen to be trapped in an exploding birthday cake with the goddess of magic or held at knifepoint by yeti assassins.

Most Forgotten Realms stories focus on strong warriors, indomitable archwizards, earthshaking events and times of peril. Even Ed Greenwood's books are mostly serious, despite his fancy for bawdy humor. Not so for the story compiled from the combined efforts of Ed Greenwood and a room of 200 Realms' enthusiasts laughing hysterically. Few fantasy stories in any setting can boast naked halflings stealing magical chastity belts; immortal archmages in pinup calendars; teleporting intelligent dogs raiding brothels for lingerie; and seventeen midget paladins on a quest to destroy the codpiece of doom. This is the minimum you should expect from Ed Greenwood's renowned collaborative story hour.

The event begins when Ed (as well as his blushing assistant) calls on attendees to provide story elements. Some fans call out fairly reasonable threads – the theft of an artifact, the disappearance of a famous druid, the murder of a notorious socialite, or the portent of a dark war. Most suggestions, however, are lewd, allowing fans to put forth the humorous thoughts that we all occasionally think (while gaming or reading fantasy novels), but never say. While this writer wrote down as many interesting comments as he could manage during the frantic story time, the yarn sessions do tend to blend together. Fortunately, Ed has a talent for combining the threads, creating an overarching (or perhaps underarching?) plot for each year's event that has elements of humor and Realms-lore.

This year's highlights included a number of interesting and laugh-inducing elements. For instance, a lingerie store is opened in Skullport that caters to the specific lace-related needs of the aberration populace of the Northwestern realms. In another thread, Mirt the Moneylender lends some coin to a group of gnomish quintuplets who wish to open a grocery store in Waterdeep. Hysterical hi-jinks ensue when a song dragon is trapped in human form. A clinic opens in town that specializes in sex changes for dragons (was that in my head?). A nearly



endless variety of unseemly and disturbing events occur that involve a number of quite serious Realms' characters. After the convention, Ed has the difficult (by enjoyable) task of sorting through the many threads contributed by fans (many of which he embellishes) and finding a common theme. Sometimes there is no common thread, but a particular element is so amusing or apropos that he directs the story around it. Previous stories have focused on a ladies' night event at the Yawning Portal, a story involving the archmage Manshoon in exquisitely detailed lingerie, and a calamitous evening that follows after Tymora lets out a Realms' shaking sneeze.

Wizards of the Coast editors prune, cut, censor and water down some of the more lewd story threads. While this event is clearly targeted at adult fans of the Forgotten Realms, the results are still available on a public website. It is at least PG-13, though probably not quite lewd enough to merit an R rating. Usually right before the following Gen Con, the Wizards of the Coast website ([www.wizards.com](http://www.wizards.com)) releases the edited and sanitized version of the story Ed wrote with the help of the Gen Con crowd.

If readers have a chance to make it to Gen Con, this is definitely an event not to be missed. If only for the amusement of watching Ed Greenwood pretend to dance like a Waterdhavian stripper (perhaps he's not pretending?) or to see favorite (or even reviled) Forgotten Realms' characters put in compromising situations, this event is a great time for all. Elminster, Khelben, the Seven Sisters and Manshoon may be nigh unstoppable in Realms' novels, but in this yarn, they are just as vulnerable as a Thayan frost-mage is to the Simbul's *fireball*.





# Freelance Writing and Publishing

by Jeffrey E. Thetford, Michael J. Thompson, and Joel “Agent X” Oberdieck

## A Collection of Great Ideas

In this multi-part article, the Silven Press Team brings together material from the wide variety of Gen Con seminars offering guidance on freelance writing. Writers new and veteran can both find advice here to help further their writing careers.

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## Publishing 101

According to the panel, the publishing industry is shrinking. There are fewer publishers, fewer anthologies, fewer opportunities in the print market and more opportunities for publishing and self-publishing on the internet. It is harder to get a publisher's attention at this time, since there are many more writers than publishers.

The process of getting your manuscript read goes thusly:

- You write a manuscript
- You send it to an editor
- Your manuscript gets assigned to a slush reader
- The slush reader likes what he read and hands it to an editor
- The editor reads your manuscript
- You get a response: “Yes,” “No,” or “We are not interested in what you sent, but we would like to see something else from you.”

It does not matter if you are talking about a game manuscript, a short story, poetry or a screenplay. The process is always the same. For example, TOR Publishing receives over 11,000 unsolicited manuscripts a year. They only have about twelve editors to read those manuscripts. This is why slush readers are used. So, with the decline in published works, it is even more imperative that you get your manuscript into the hands of one of these overworked editors. Here are some guidelines that will help you get your work read and, possibly, one step farther toward publishing.

- Follow the submission guidelines for any publisher you are submitting to—**specifically!** Don't deviate because you don't like the font or you don't have the exact box to send it in. Do whatever they ask you to do if you are really interested in publishing with that particular company. And if you're not really interested in that particular publisher, odds are you shouldn't waste your time or theirs.
- Use 12pt Times New Roman, double-spaced and with page numbers, or however the publisher asks you to do it.
- Always send your manuscript in a box, unstapled. Don't



Panel of published authors: Jean Rabe, Donald Bingle, Elizabeth Vaughan. This panel of published authors gives their advice to first-time writers on how to get published

make anyone have to sign for your manuscript, as this irritates them. Send priority mail only. This way you get a notice that it was delivered and you are not making some tired editor leave his/her desk and traipse down to the post office for your manuscript—not the way to be remembered. You must catch the attention of the reader, be it slush or editor, in the first five pages of your manuscript. You may have a great fight scene in chapter three that makes all others written since the beginning of the printed word obsolete, but if you don't catch their attention in the first five pages, that fight scene may never see print except on your home printer.

- When you send a sample of your work, send the first three chapters (or the first 50 to 75 pages), not chapter one, eight and sixteen because that is your best work. An editor can't get a sense of your writing and ability to tell a story unless you send work that can be followed from chapter to chapter.
- Never, EVER, pay for any editor or agent to read or promote your manuscript. These are called Scam Editors/Agents. This is also called POD (Payment on Demand). Remember this golden rule of writing: **Money Flows to the Writer, Not Away.**
- If you are requested by an editor to send them your manuscript, make sure it goes directly to that specific editor. Make a big note on the manuscript box that says “ATTN: Joe Blow Editor, Joe Blow Publishing.” This way, it won't get lost with the other manuscripts in the slush pile.
- Make sure you know what they pay, how they pay and when they pay. Some writers insist on getting an agent right



away, others do not. This is a personal decision in which I got about a 50/50 response as to whether one is necessary or a waste of 10-15% of the income off the sale of your book. At first, the consensus seems to be that one is not necessary. Then, when you are rich and famous, an agent may help to build better and

stronger deals, relationships with other editors and publishers and may get you a better percentage return on your work.

➤ If the publisher asks for a query letter, then send one. Follow these guidelines as carefully as you would the submission guidelines of your manuscript.

### Fiction Markets

ACE Books	375 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014	<a href="http://us.penguingroup.com/static/html/aboutus/contactus.html#MANUSCRIPT">http://us.penguingroup.com/static/html/aboutus/contactus.html#MANUSCRIPT</a>
Arkham House Publishers	P.O. Box 546, Sauk City, WI	<a href="http://www.arkhamhouse.com">www.arkhamhouse.com</a>
BAEN Books	P.O. Box 1403, Riverdale, NY 10471	<a href="http://www.baen.com">www.baen.com</a>
Bantam Spectra Books	1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019	<a href="http://www.randomhouse.com/bantamdell/spectra.html">http://www.randomhouse.com/bantamdell/spectra.html</a>
Blindside Publishing	1959 N. Peace Haven Rd. #217, Winston-Salem, NC 27106-4850	<a href="http://www.blindside.net/guidelines.html">http://www.blindside.net/guidelines.html</a>
DAW Books	375 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014	<a href="http://us.penguingroup.com/static/html/aboutus/contactus.html#MANUSCRIPT">http://us.penguingroup.com/static/html/aboutus/contactus.html#MANUSCRIPT</a>
DEL REY Books	1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019	<a href="http://www.delreybooks.com">www.delreybooks.com</a>
Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy	P.O. Box 1714, Calgary, AB T2P 2L7 Canada	<a href="http://www.edgewebsite.com">www.edgewebsite.com</a>
EOS (Harper Collins)	1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 100	<a href="http://www.harpercollins.com">www.harpercollins.com</a>
Five Star Science Fiction and Fantasy, Tekno Books	P.O. Box 8296, Green Bay, WI 54308	<a href="mailto:tekno@new.rr.com">tekno@new.rr.com</a>
Luna Books	233 Broadway Suite 1001, New York, NY 10279	<a href="http://www.luna-books.com">www.luna-books.com</a>
PHOBOS Books	200 Park Ave South Suite 1109, New York, NY	<a href="http://www.phobosweb.com">www.phobosweb.com</a>
RIPTIDE PRESS, INC.	233 Walnut Creek Dr., Clayton NC 27520-7241	<a href="http://www.riptidepress.com">http://www.riptidepress.com</a>
ROC Books	375 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014-3657	<a href="http://us.penguingroup.com/static/html/aboutus/contactus.html#MANUSCRIPT">http://us.penguingroup.com/static/html/aboutus/contactus.html#MANUSCRIPT</a>
St. Martin's Press	175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010-7848	<a href="http://www.stmartins.com">www.stmartins.com</a>
TOR Books	175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010-7848	<a href="http://www.tor.com/">http://www.tor.com/</a>
Warner Aspect Books	1271 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020	<a href="http://www.twbookmark.com/sciencefiction">www.twbookmark.com/sciencefiction</a>

### Short Story & Novella Markets

Red Inkworks	<a href="http://www.redinkworks.com/">http://www.redinkworks.com/</a>
Author Network (Markets for short stories, writers' advice on short fiction, interesting links)	<a href="http://www.author-network.com/">http://www.author-network.com/</a>
Victory Page (Links to short fiction opportunities and markets)	<a href="http://www.crayne.com/markets.htm">www.crayne.com/markets.htm</a>
Ralan's Webstravaganza (One of best for open anthology news and market reports for all lengths of fiction)	<a href="http://www.ralan.com">www.ralan.com</a>



➤ Don't quote anyone that has read it that will not be recognized by the editor. Although the hardware store owner absolutely raves about your manuscript, and he once submitted a novel idea to So-In-So Publishing, he probably won't pull much weight with the editor you send it to if you quote him. So, don't quote him. And don't pay for quotes. There are people out there that will charge you to give their feelings on your book. They are a waste of your money. One good way to get around this is to make friends with as many published authors as you can. Go to conventions and meet them and get to know them. Make friends with them and see if you can get them to read a few chapters of your work. It is tough, but some are out there that love to give back to the unpublished, remembering what it was like.

Now that you are totally overwhelmed with the business of getting your work read, see the table above for a few publishers and their websites that you may find helpful.

### A Rip-Roaring Yarn

When writing the 'Rip-Roaring Yarn,' one of the things you have to consider is the 'cliffhanger.' A good example of this type of writing can be seen in JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* books. At the end of each chapter there is a cliffhanger that keeps you moving into the next. This is the 'set-up,' if you will, of the next chapter. This is done in lots of writing, but Rowling has become an expert at set-up and payoff. The payoff is in the next chapter that follows the cliffhanger. This is a difficult technique to use, but can be very effective, and if learned early can propel a reader forward.

Cliffhangers are notorious for leaving the reader wanting more, with unexpected plot turns or releasing small bits of information in each chapter so that the reader is as inclined to figure out the ending as is the protagonist. Your fiction needs to have the action, suspense and time-released information necessary to keep the reader turning the page, and just before the payoff, **BAM!**, the climatic end of the book and a guaranteed sale for the next one due out next year.

Another aspect of the Rip-Roaring Yarn is the multiple view points (MVPs). The T.V. shows *Lost* and *24* are notorious for running not only clever MVPs, but for having multiple story lines going on at the same time. This is good for a mystery where you have several people trying to answer the "Who dunnit?" question.

Character development is one of the hardest and most painful parts of writing. What you need to keep in mind is that you need well rounded, sympathetic characters—characters that your reader will care about when they are inches away from being eaten or standing at the tip of a cutpurse's sword. If Sir Heartsong is the son of a rich aristocrat that is nice and pleasant and gives him everything he wants, the reader will be less sympathetic than if his father was a tyrannical, thieving land baron that steals from the coffers of the king, beats the pet dog and forces Sir Heartsong to marry for money and land, not love. The character needs to be motivated. When this happens, the reader is motivated to finish and hopefully buy more of your books.



The page-turner ... how do you write one? Panelists John Helfers, Chris Pierson, and Tim Waggoner offer advice on how to add excitement and fast pacing to your prose.

Conflict is another major aspect of writing. There has to be a reason why the protagonist acts the way he does. Why does he go to the pub every night? Why does he have clandestine meetings at exactly 12:01 on the quarter moon each month? Conflict can also mean the internal clock of the story. Or, more literally, the clock the protagonist has to beat to save the heroine. Change the tempo of the clock or use a 'double clock.' This way, the protagonist may beat one clock, but not the other: he may save the heroine, but the kingdom falls to revolution because of his choices. Don't always beat the clock that you set for your characters. Raise the stakes if you have multiple clocks going at once. He has to make a choice to save the family fortune or stop the pirates from kidnapping his love while having to meet with the bailiff to settle an old debt—all before supper!

Make them choose which goal to achieve and which one they allow to play out. Always raise the stakes. If the protagonist always gets his man and the ladies, then after awhile, it becomes too predictable.

Make your characters real. Give them doubts, concerns, fears and anxieties. Give them self-doubt, unreliability and quirkiness. Make the reader feel that *they* could be the hero as well as anyone. You want to make your reader sympathetic to the characters or they become cardboard and fictional. Don't forget the villains either. You want them to be as real as the heroes. Get into their heads. What made them the way they are? Did their parents beat them? Did they have a pet die in their arms? Were they left at the altar when the heroine ran away with the hero? Do unexpected things with them. Again, predictability will kill the antagonist as quickly as a sword through the head. Make them real and the reader will keep reading—and buying your books.

### Mapping Your Fiction

We have discussed character development and character motivation; now let's talk about mapping. When writing fiction, it is beneficial to create a map of your fictional world, as this allows greater internal consistency and, if included in the work of fiction, easier visualization by the reader.



### ***Writing for a Shared-World Story (e.g. *Forgotten Realms*)***

In this case, much about the world is already known and there is usually a canonical map that the author can (and often must) use as a basis. This has the advantage of reducing the workload of the author, but is also constraining in that one cannot alter the established details without in-world explanations.

### ***Writing for Your Own World***

In this case, it is up to the author to make a map for his own world. The panel suggests that even if the author is inclined to “wing it” and just make up the world as he/she goes along, it is wise to make a map afterwards to maintain consistency should he/she decide to revisit that world. There are, however, advantages to making a map before hand. For example, the author can make a map and create adventures for the characters based on interesting geographical challenges they face in the region. Also, detailed maps can allow more realistic travel times and terrain experiences. Finally, a map on the first few pages of a piece of fiction instantly captures the imagination of the reader and brings him closer to the world from the start (e.g. *Lord of the Rings*).

Things to remember when making a map:

- Use a simple atlas to get a feel for how natural terrain features develop. For example, notice that rivers don't flow through rising elevations, and mountain ranges block precipitation, leading to lush areas on their west and dry areas on their east.
- It is important to note the natural resources and climate that exist in various areas, especially water, as these have vast impact on what kinds of civilizations will form there.
- A detailed scale map can make distances more consistent.
- Don't make a map of a continent when your story only takes place in one city. Fit the scale of your map to the scope of your story.
- Finally, it's perfectly fine to have geography that defies Earth rationality, but you do need to explain it, at least to yourself. In fact, irrational geography can be a source of story inspiration: for example, how does this city thrive in the middle of a desert?

### **So You Want to Write for White Wolf?**

The Production and Development staff from White Wolf gave tips and tricks on how to get your submissions reviewed, and what it takes to become a writer who earns contracts from White Wolf.

White Wolf is strictly a ‘work-for-hire’ company. They hire you to work on a specific project and you get paid for that project. When asked what this means to White Wolf, one of the staff answered, “Writing for White Wolf means ‘don't write like a jerk,’ otherwise you will be asked to write things other than what you want.”

White Wolf no longer supports a fiction line of books. Their main development is in their *Bloodline* books. If you want to write for White Wolf, you need to submit strictly to these lines. They are very concerned with the number of words you can write in the shortest period of time. White Wolf is a very ‘time-crunched’ company. They may call you and ask “How fast can

you get me 10,000 words for the upcoming *Vampire* book?” If you can do 10,000 words in a week, and this other writer can do it in six days, you probably will lose the contract to the other guy. They want to know how many words you can write in a day, week, month and year to be an essential freelance writer for White Wolf. This way, when they need something written that is a certain length; they know they can count on you to write it because you have done it before. Also, if you come up short on the deadline, you're pretty much not going to get another chance to write anything for them again. Stick to the submission requirements.

White Wolf does not like passive voice. They are a very disciplined company when it comes to voice and writing. If you don't have a knack for prose, they don't want to read your stuff. You may know the rules and the setting and dream vampires in the cold damp night, but if you can't put enough words together to write a cohesive sentence, then don't submit. Your werewolves need to be brutish and savage; your vampires gothic. You need to be able to get away with ‘purple prose.’ Purple prose is used to describe passages, or sometimes entire literary works, written in prose so overly-extravagant that it draws attention to itself. It manipulates the reader's response to the work with exaggerated pathos—sensuously evocative beyond the requirements of its context. Not only ‘show, don't tell,’ but ‘show until the vein pops out on your temples as adjectives are literally sucked from the air around you as you pour your soul into those 10,000 words.’



(L to R) JD Wiker, Marc Schmalz, and Stan! of The Game Mechanics.

### **Go Publish Yourself! Starting Your Own Small Business**

JD Wiker, Marc Schmalz, and Stan! of the Game Mechanics presented a panel discussion on establishing a small publishing company. Their presentation was humorous and entertaining, even though some may consider the ins and outs of forming a business to be a rather dry topic.

After deciding to go into business, the first decision to be made is determining the type of business to form. There are several to choose from, each with their own strengths and weaknesses: sole proprietorship, partnership, limited liability company (LLC), S corporation, and corporation. The panel recommended either an LLC or an S corporation, as each offers a level of liability protection with a minimum amount of work or cash. The costs involved in forming a business vary from state to state; legal



counsel is recommended for assistance in processing paperwork. Legal advice and help is usually not free (unless one has a lawyer friend willing to help out gratis), but worth it in the long run.

Financing a new company is not as expensive as one might think. The Game Mechanics, for example, started with four men (the panel members plus Rich Redman) who chipped in a total of one thousand dollars. Other companies have started with even less. A small initial capital investment does not mean failure. Not all members of the new company may be able to put in the same amount of cash. It is important to remember that time and work put into the company should also be considered capital investments.

It is also important to write a business plan. A business plan is basically a road map for the creative mission and financial future of any company. A company with a solid business plan is far more likely to survive than one that does not take the time to write one.

Once the business is established the real work begins. Marketing will play an integral part in a business' success. The panel suggests giving away products for free. Short PDF items, for instance, make great give-aways. Don't consider free goods a loss of revenue; this marketing method is a means to get potential customers to your web site and to show off the quality of your work. Never underestimate the profit power of free goods!

The question of publishing physical products versus PDF products poses an interesting problem. While hard copy books and sales in brick-and-mortar outlets generate more sales, production costs are also much higher. On the other end of the spectrum, PDF products are inexpensive to create but do not sell in great volume; most will not sell even 100 copies in a year. If you really want to sell physical products but don't have the expertise or funding, the panel recommends partnering with a bigger company that does have the experience and cash. It is also more likely that your products will get shelf space if they are published by a larger, more well-known entity. For PDF products, the best places to sell are from established sales sites: the largest and most well known are RPGNow ([www.rpgnow.com](http://www.rpgnow.com)) and DriveThruRPG ([www.drivethrurpg.com](http://www.drivethrurpg.com)).

Audience members posed a number of questions regarding how to determine price points for products. There is no one perfect answer; the Game Mechanics, for example, initially based their PDF product costs on the minimums set by RPGNow.

There were many other items to think about when forming a new company that could not be covered in only one hour. The panel threw out a number of expense topics for interested people to research on their own: salaries, rent, advertising, office supplies/utilities, delivery services, legal fees, accounting fees, loans and taxes, and licensing costs. Not every business will deal with all of these costs; every business will definitely deal with a few.

### Want More Information?

Check out these links.

The Game Mechanics: [www.thegamemechanics.com](http://www.thegamemechanics.com)

Game Publishers Association (GPA): [www.thegpa.org](http://www.thegpa.org)

Game Manufacturers Association (GAMA): [www.gama.org](http://www.gama.org)





higher level of quality among the d20 products available, players may not feel the need to search out other systems to find quality material.

Moreover, Wizards of the Coast may well be the first company to pick up from the slump. Their new products, such as the *D&D Player's Kit* (complete with trade paperback *Player's Handbook*, dice and supplements), are poised to bring in new gamers in large numbers. Moreover, they can produce new ancillary products such as the new *Dungeon Tiles* to help enhance game play, thus retaining old players while attracting the new.

The RPG world does need innovation. However, at the current time there are few companies that are capable of providing that resource. Innovation is a fickle mistress, though, and it can pop up anywhere. But until it does, d20 remains the standard.



## New & Upcoming d20 Products

To ease the fears that d20 may be on its way out the proverbial door, here is a list of products, both new and upcoming, that prove the continued strength of the d20 system.

Sovereign Press ([www.sovpress.com](http://www.sovpress.com))

Dragonlance: *Dragons of Autumn*

Knightly Order of Anaslön

Privateer Press ([www.privateerpress.com](http://www.privateerpress.com))

Iron Kingdoms: *Five Fingers: Port of Deceit*

Malhavoc Press ([www.montecook.com/malhavoc](http://www.montecook.com/malhavoc))

Ptolus: Monte Cook's City by the Spire

*A Player's Guide to Ptolus*

Sword & Sorcery ([www.swordsorcery.com](http://www.swordsorcery.com))

World of Warcraft: Alliance Player's Guide

Wizards of the Coast ([www.wizards.com](http://www.wizards.com))

*Dungeon Tiles*

d20 Modern: *Critical Locations*

d20 Modern: *Future Tech*

d20 Modern: *Dark\*Matter*

Eberron: *Faiths of Eberron*

Eberron: *Dragon Magic*

Forgotten Realms: *Dragons of Faerûn*

Forgotten Realms: *The Twilight Tomb*

*Three Dragon Ante*

Eberron: *Dragonmarked* (11/06)

*Cityscape* (11/06)

*Scourge of the Howling Horde* (adventure) (11/06)

*The Shattered Gates of Slaughterguard* (adventure) (12/06)

*Fantastic Locations: The Frostfell Rift* (12/06)

*Fiendish Codex II: Tyrants of the Nine Hells* (12/06)

Green Ronin ([www.greenronin.com](http://www.greenronin.com))

True 20 Bestiary

True Sorcery

*Bleeding Edge Adventure #1: Mansion of Shadows* (adventure)

Damnation Decade

Mutants & Masterminds: *Mastermind's Manual*

Mongoose Publishing ([www.mongoosepublishing.com](http://www.mongoosepublishing.com))

*Babylon 5: Guide to the Station*



## The Year to Come Wizards of the Coast

by Eytan Bernstein

Throughout the rest of 2006 and 2007, Wizards of the Coast has an interesting and deliberate product release schedule planned. Most of the products were scheduled long before rumors of a 4th edition surfaced, but all have the air of an evolution in Wizards' release philosophy.

Whereas Wizards has previously released books that were mainly useful for their "crunch" – feats, spells, items, monsters and especially prestige classes – its current schedule has a great deal more adventures, options products, product accessories and nostalgia-based releases. Wizards is also increasing its production of collectible miniatures, one of its most lucrative sectors of business. But in the past two years, Wizards has slowly been increasing the amount of fluff – ecology, description, encounters and setting-specific examples – to match its crunch.

The first change was with prestige classes. Rather than producing just the bare bones of the class – requirements, abilities, ability descriptions and sometimes sample characters – it also contained other information on the class. This included how the class fits into the world; what it means to play a character with this class; organizations for members; and other forms of exposition.

Following prestige classes were monster entries. Monsters received more ecology, sample encounters and setting information. Magic items have experienced several changes, but will finally settle on their most user-friendly model with March 2007's *Magic Item Compendium*. On the heels of the *Spell Compendium*, this is expected to be one of the most popular books of 2007.

None of the changes means that Wizards of the Coast is abandoning crunch in its books. In the coming year, it has planned a number of crunch-focused supplements. *Complete Mage*, *Complete Champion* and *Complete Scoundrel* will contain new mechanics. In many ways, these books are follow-ups to *Complete Arcane*, *Complete Divine*, *Complete Warrior* and *Complete Adventurer*. Of particular note is the inclusion of new invocations in *Complete Mage* and *Dragon Magic* for the warlock class, the most popular core class outside of the 11 in the core rules.

New environment books are also planned, including *Cityscape* and *Dungeonscape* – books detailing environments that include play options for cities and dungeons. Each follows the format of books such as *Frostburn*, *Sandstorm* and *Stormwrack*.

Fans have been requesting more adventures from Wizards of the Coast for some time, and it seems they will finally get their wish. WotC is planning the "expedition" series, a set of adventure books that updates classic modules from pre-3rd edition D&D. The first book is *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft*, based on the iconic adventure created by Tracy and Laura Hickman. Other expeditions are planned for classic D&D adventures.

This new emphasis on adventures also applies to the Forgotten Realms, which has had numerous supplements over different

editions. Wizards is looking to diversify the product line in order to avoid repetition and redundancy. In 2007, most of the Forgotten Realms' supplements will be some sort of adventure, though a few non-adventure books will be released. One new adventure release will be a multipart campaign arc adventure that begins with *Cormyr: The Tearing of the Weave*.

While the state of the industry will be discussed more in another article in this issue, it is worthwhile to discuss how Wizards responded to rumors of the imminent release of a new edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*.

While this author has heard discussion from official and unofficial sources, the general gist is that there is no chance of a 4th edition before 2008. Some readers may interpret that this means that 2008 is when an announcement will occur, but Wizards' officials caution that this isn't accurate either. What they are saying is that they are positive that nothing will occur before 2008, but that 2008 is far enough away that they can't predict what will occur. Wizards' employees did extensive slideshows depicting numerous products scheduled through the end of 2007. These products show that WotC staff and freelancers are still working hard on projects using the current rules. They would not be so focused on this if another edition was about to invalidate their efforts.

The next 18 months will see many exciting releases, some of which are on the verge of announcement while others are still in development. Wizards of the Coast is evolving its design philosophy to take into account the refining tastes of its clientele while trying to remain true to all of its customers. It's impossible for everyone to be happy with any single project, but the company is trying to create a variety of products that cater to the multitude of tastes among its buyers. The abundance of projects scheduled for the next year and a half should assure worried gamers that 4th edition is not looming over their heads, and that there will be ample notice if and when it ever does come about.

## What's New With Eberron?

by Landon Winkler

Going to a Wizards of the Coast product seminar is a unique experience compared to the rest of Gen Con. Even with the two hours provided, there's really only enough time for an overview of coming products and a quick question-and-answer session. The number of new books, especially novels, coming out for the Eberron setting this next year is just staggering.

First on the agenda was *Faiths of Eberron*, which should be available this month. It's going to be covering every religion in the Eberron setting, with more detail given for the larger faiths, but a few extra splinter sects thrown in for good measure.

November will herald the much-awaited *Dragonmarked*. This book is largely aimed at players of dragonmarked characters, with cultural information about the different houses, rules for using aberrant dragonmarks, and information on what the "Favored in House" feat really means to the members of different houses.

The *Secrets of Sarlo* continuing their c of course cover Ri options. But it wil human civilization have nothing to d

The *Secrets of Sarlona* is slated for February of next year, continuing their coverage of different continents. The book will of course cover Riedra, the Inspired, and new psionic character options. But it will also have information about the ancient human civilizations abandoned on the continent and hooks that have nothing to do with Riedra at all.

Of the projected supplements, *Eyes of the Lich Queen* is the most anticipated. It's a "globetrotting mega-adventure" coming out in April, spanning three continents, and involving the Lich Queen Vol and the draconic prophecy. The adventure will take characters, surprisingly, only from levels 4-10. The only spoiler we were able to get was of a classic Eberron battle inside an Argonnessen dragon orrery.

There were also two RPG supplements mentioned though names couldn't be revealed yet for legal reasons. One will cover the Last War and its effects on the current setting. It will also contain some very useful information if you're running a Last War campaign. The other, while still untitled, "will be about the *dragons*, and the *secrets* of their *homeland*." Expect to see those around July and October of next year, respectively.

A horde of Eberron novels are also upcoming. These include the final books of the *Lark Mark*, *Dreaming Dark*, and *Dragon Below* series, all out this winter. The *Flight of the Dying Sun*, second book of the *Heirs of Ash* series by Rich Wulf, and *Forge of the Mindslayers*, second book in the *Blade of the Flame*, will both be out in early 2007. In April 2007, *Bound By Iron* will be launching a new set of detective novels for Eberron, exposing some of its gritty noir roots.

The question and answer afterwards was also quite enlightening. A few good tips came from this that you might be able to use in your weekly game. The first is this: whenever you would use the planes in Eberron, consider manifest zones first and use those if you can. And also never, under any circumstances, crash airships twice during the same campaign. Your players will never trust public transit again.

The story team also gave us one more non-canon Eberron tidbit. As the dragons hail from Siberys and the rakshasa from Khyber, they've always thought the couatl ought to have come from Eberron to complete the trinity.

All in all, Eberron fans have a big year to look forward to. Even non-fans might want to dip into *Secrets of Sarlona* for that rare dollop of psionics material.

## News from the Iron Kingdoms

*by Landon Winkler*

The *Iron Kingdoms* line from Privateer Press has always been marked by quality over quantity. One constant refrain of their seminar at Gen Con was how they'd rather delay a product than release it without the proper polish.

The *Monsternomicon II*, announced last year, is getting that final treatment now. It focuses on creatures from extreme environments, especially those in the eastern kingdoms.

### Riassunto della Lezione settimana

abbiamo imparato:

Pendrake, narrator of the first *Monsternomicon*, reprises his role, having been taken captive by the Scorn. His experiences living among the Scorn will show throughout the book, providing not only a load of information on Scorn creatures, but also character classes focusing on Scorn magic and information that could be used to start a Scorn campaign.

And with Pendrake captive of the Scorn, it seems like a good time to release an adventure for high-level PCs (say 10th-15th level), sending them into the eastern lands to rescue him. From what the folks at Privateer Press said, it seems the adventure will be more open-ended than some others, allowing for a sort of freeform wandering and problem solving sidequests. However, even though they are picking their own route into the eastern kingdoms, PCs will have some challenging tests that can't be avoided, including Pendrake's reluctance to leave behind the discoveries he's been promised.

Fans of the *Iron Kingdoms* may already recognize the name *Sign and Sigil*, announced at last year's Gen Con. They're still working on it, but the content sounds great. More than a source book, it also promises to present the story of the "dark origins of human magic" hinted at throughout the *Iron Kingdoms* line. Some highlights included gun mages, infernalists, necrotechnology, and a lot of information about the Fraternal Order.

To represent some of the societies within the Iron Kingdoms, *Sign and Sigil* will be introducing what has been called “Paths of Power.” These paths have prerequisites reminiscent of a prestige class, but grant titles and small doses of power without the class or feat baggage. In addition to avoiding more prestige class bloat, these paths will allow Privateer Press to represent several organizations in the space it would take for one prestige class.

Lastly, there's talk about a strange development: Privateer Press may be doing their first product about pirates. Tentatively scheduled for next summer, it would provide an entire book about adventures and piracy near Five Fingers and elsewhere.

In addition to these books, Privateer continues to produce the *No Quarter* bi-monthly magazine (with the potential for an anthology on the horizon) along with their miniatures lines. Players of those minis games got one teaser at the *Iron Kingdoms* seminar: some of the creatures for the next *Hordes* expansion will actually be premiering a bit early in the *Monsternomicon II*.



One of the guards at the booth for Privateer Press, publishers of *Iron Kingdoms*.



## Planewalker Q&A

by Joel "Agent X" Oberdieck

One of the most personal and entertaining seminars I had the opportunity to attend this Gen Con was a question and answer session with the writers and editors of Planewalker.com. Led by Sarah "Clueless" Hood, the small gathering informed fans of where the site had been and where it was going, but quickly transformed into a brainstorming session of what one can do with an infinite setting. I came away from the seminar knowing that a setting I loved remained in good hands.

For those not familiar with Planewalker.com, it is the current official fan site for the old Planescape setting from second edition *Dungeons & Dragons*. What does being the "official fan site" mean, one might ask? Basically, Planewalker.com has permission to update anything and everything released for the Planescape setting to *Dungeons & Dragons Edition 3.5*, including things not included in the SRD, such as the Gith races and illithids. Consequently, however, the site is not covered under the standard d20 licenses and cannot automatically make use of third-party d20 material.

Over the past several years the site has made a great deal of progress towards the online publication of an official update to the Planescape setting, having finished the text of a massive document on the Multiverse along with a number of smaller projects, such as a 300-page description of one particular Prime World in the setting, Ortho. An equally impressive accomplishment, the site won the Silver ENnie for Best Fan Site in 2005.

Ahead for the site, the authors hope to add artwork to the finished texts, bringing them to life. With the groundwork of the setting complete, the authors plan to run an overarching plotline of struggle among the newly-empowered Guilds within Sigil, the primary city in the setting, while continuing to explore the fallout of the last official adventure for the setting, *Faction War*. Plans for the storyline as a whole remain tenuous, and a separate event was held at Gen Con where the authors and fans brainstormed about several upcoming possibilities.

As far as publications in the works, the creative team indicated a strong desire to make adventure modules in the future, expanding on a number of ideas from the updated core text. If the quality of their work holds, these modules will certainly be of value to anyone interested in the Planescape setting, and will serve as a good method of introducing a new generation of players to the Planes.

## Kenzer and Company Q&A

by Joel "Agent X" Oberdieck

The Kenzer and Company seminar this year was held at 8:00 PM on the Friday night of Gen Con, a time when all of the dealers would just be back from dinner. I mention this only because the speakers, including Steve Johanson and Dave Kenzer, were late to the seminar for this very reason, and partially for this reason the entire seminar had an after-dinner conversational feel to it. During the discussion, a variety of

products were passed around while the panel talked about upcoming projects. Two of those projects dominated the seminar discussion.

The first of these is *Aces and Eights: Shattered Frontier*, a western RPG. This product was initially scheduled for release some time ago, but has been delayed due to excess of material; a good deal of material will have to be cut in order to get the text to a publishable 300 pages. Given the delays, Kenzer has put the product into a second beta-testing phase to attempt to streamline the system even more. While no sample was available at the seminar, two interesting aspects of the game were detailed. First, the game strives to make non-gunfighting aspects of the western genre (such as prospecting, ranching, and cattle drives) exciting and detailed by turning them into mini-games of a sort. Second, the method used for gunfighting involves a targeting overlay on a silhouette of your opponent, which allows one to visually determine where a shot hit. Despite a lack of interest in the western genre, I was intrigued by this game because of those innovations.

The second project covered in detail is the forthcoming *Mother of All Treasure Tables* for d20. The basic idea of this product is to flesh out the treasure results from the d20 Core Rulesbooks by replacing gold amounts with items of equivalent value. So instead of finding 30sp in the hobgoblin's layer, for example, you can now find a variety of (non-magical) weapons, gear, food, clothing and other items worth a total of 30sp. The book will be laid out by treasure value, so it will be easy to look up the desired value and roll on a table for a specific combination of items. This product should be good for game masters interested in a detailed description of encounters, but will obviously detract from the party's liquid wealth when used in a campaign.

The remainder of the seminar was spent discussing several scattered topics. Two new products available now, a board game called the *Great Space Race* and the *Tech Support* card game, were passed around but not discussed at length. Mention was made of plans for changes to the *Hackmaster* line, which will shift the setting from Garweeze World to Kalamar, allowing easier setting support. Finally, a great deal of time was spent on Kenzer trivia questions, featuring quotes from *Knights of the Dinner Table*, as well as trivia from games and the company's history. All in all, it was a very fun and relaxed seminar, which showed how close to their fan base the company remains.

## The Order of the Stick

by Elizabeth Koprucki

The *Order of the Stick* (OotS) seminar was extremely popular – so much so that it had to move from a small room on the third floor of the Hyatt to one of the larger second-floor rooms. It was as lively and humorous as comic readers would expect. Rich Burlew, the comic's creator, answered questions and offered background on the comic, as well as information on what he'll be doing next.

The *Order of the Stick* is a web comic, now also found in *Dragon* magazine, done in a carefully stylized stick-figure style. The strips follow a party of adventures (the Order) and their exploits as they fight their evil counterparts the Linear Guild, as

IL POLIGLOTTA MODERNO — *Lingua Inglese*



Those who enjoy playing mortals or supernaturals within the World of Darkness will be treated to *Urban Legends*, a comprehensive book detailing supernatural beings and events that don't fit in with the other product lines, and how to incorporate those into your game.

*Exalted* players will have to wait for their new stuff, sadly. Both the Lunars' and Sidereals' books will be released in late 2007, as well as a book detailing the workings of each of the celestial directions. Another interesting product announced is an *Exalted* board game, set in a battle for the Bloodset Isle.

One brand new product that the developers were excited about was *Scion*, a product which will have nothing to do with the World of Darkness. The game revolves around players characters portraying the children of various deities in the modern world. The game promises to lead the characters from "mere" demigod status to actually becoming gods and joining the pantheons themselves.

As an oddity, the panel teased the audience about "Special Project M." After announcing it, though, the panel refused to provide any more information, leaving fans eagerly eyeing their messageboards waiting to learn more.

## For More Information...

To keep tabs on the upcoming products for your favorite game, or to keep your eyes open for information about newer product lines, check out these links:

Vampire: The Requiem: <http://www.white-wolf.com/vampire/index.php>

Werewolf: The Forsaken: <http://www.white-wolf.com/werewolf/index.php>

Mage: The Awakening: <http://www.white-wolf.com/mage/index.php>

Promethean: The Created: <http://www.white-wolf.com/promethean/index.php>

Changeling: <http://www.white-wolf.com/changeling/index.php>

The White Wolf Forums: <http://forums.white-wolf.com/index.php>

Monte Cook admits that his last RPG project is with White Wolf, but he still couldn't say what it was. Read about that announcement in the article on page 8 [link to p8] of this issue, and share your thoughts on what that project might be at the Silven Forums.

## News about Paizo Publishing

by Jeffrey E. Thetford

The future of Paizo Publishing looks bright indeed, and the panel was very excited to talk about everything they have in the works.

One of the biggest releases this year was the *Dragon Compendium*, which is a collection of some of the best content of *Dragon Magazine's* first 30 years, updated to version 3.5 of the *Dungeons & Dragons* Rules. Erik Mona hopes to also release another hardcover book of the *Age of Worms* and another *Dragon Compendium* as soon as Wizards of the Coast gives the big thumbs up.

### Adventure Paths: *Savage Tide*

The first thing they talked about was their plan to continue to use the Adventure Path concept in both *Dungeon* and *Dragon*. It started a few years ago in *Dungeon* magazine with the *Shackled City* adventure path. The compilation of these adventure paths came out at last year's Gen Con as a hardcover book called *The Shackled City*. Look for more adventure paths in future *Dungeon* and *Dragon* magazines.

Along the lines of the adventure paths already being done, they reintroduced a section on *Dragon* called "Worm Food," which was a way to supplement the adventure material for the players to use. And starting in the issue of *Dungeon* #139, they are going to introduce their third adventure path, called the *Savage Tide*.

At their booth, Paizo was selling the *Player's Guide to the Savage Tide* adventure path, which has a full color map of the city of Sasserine, introduced before in the *Shackled City* adventure path. The first few adventures of the *Savage Tide* take place in Sasserine. This guide gives you everything you need to make characters for the campaign. It has some new feats and some bonus information, and gives hints as to what type of characters would be best to run in the campaign.

The campaign itself will be twelve issues long and will run from issue #139 through issue #150 of *Dungeon* magazine. This adventure path will take your characters from 1st level through 20th over the course of the year. After starting in Sasserine, the adventure quickly moves to the characters inheriting their own ship called the *Sea Wyvern* (a poster map of the ship will be in one of the issues) and from here, the characters move to an old standby adventure on the Isle of Dread. Pretty much the middle third of the adventure takes place on the Isle of Dread. After the party moves from the Isle of Dread, they move to a more infamous portion of the realms—the Abyss.

For *Dragon*, there will be a new section in the October edition called "Savage Tidings," which will expand the setting of the adventure path a little with each issue. "Savage Tidings" will be a twelve-part installment that will give players playing *Savage Tide* a little bit of an edge (tools, tips and character build options) to help them survive this long and dangerous campaign. It is designed to fill in the background for the characters. It will also have handy information about what to do when your character

## The Isle of Dread

For anyone who has been playing *Dungeons & Dragons* for 20 years, yes, it is the same Isle of Dread you are familiar with (an adventure that is very heavily inspired by *King Kong*: lots of dinosaurs, man-eating plants, etc.). Some of the artists that are working on the art are those that worked on the art for *King Kong* and *Lord of the Rings*.

dies and you have to make a new one; where they would come from and how they can fit easily into the story. There will also be lots of organizations for your character to join, including The Scarlet Brotherhood. Along with all of this great information, there will be new spells and feats that will help the characters in this campaign. This will be a player-friendly resource for those playing the *Savage Tide* adventure path.

### More Great Content

In an upcoming issue of *Dragon*, Paizo will be revisiting the Horde Lands, which will give readers an idea of what has been going on between Faerûn and Kara-Tur over the course of the last several years. In terms of campaign continuity, it is going to give information on how to run the *Horde's Barbarian* campaign and how to use influences from that region in a normal *Forgotten Realms* campaign.

*Dragon* is also going to do another "Cities of the Forgotten Realms" piece by Ed Greenwood. It will be a city in the kingdom of Aglarond, although Erik Mona would not elaborate any more on which city it will cover. They are also introducing a new column in *Dragon*. In every issue, there will be a four-page article about the Forgotten Realms and a four-page article about Eberron. From what Erik Mona said, it sounds like it will be a smorgasbord of information—not settling in on any area in particular, but letting the authors sort of 'fill in the blanks' in each of the campaign settings with information.

Erik has been working with two authors over the last year or so, Wolfgang Baur (a former *Dragon* editor) and China Mieville, and will be doing an issue in February 2007 that covers China Mieville's world. It will give D&D statistics for the races of his world and an overview of the city of Perdido Street Station that you can use in your own campaigns.

One theme that has not seen the pages of *Dragon* in over 100 issues until last year is the "Creature Catalog" – a very large article that gives statistics for 15 to 20 monsters. This will become an annual theme starting in 2007. *Dragon* now has an annual theme called the Campaign Classics theme, and this year will be no different. The January issue will include a number of different campaign settings. This year, they



The Paizo panel consisted of: (R to L) Erik Mona (Publisher of Paizo and Editor in Chief of *Dragon* magazine), Joshua Front (Advertising and Marketing Director at Paizo), Jason Bulmahn (Managing Editor of *Dragon* magazine), James Jacobs (new Editor in Chief of *Dungeon* magazine), Wes Schneider (Associated Manager of *Dragon* magazine)

decided to do something a little different and came up with the framework to encapsulate all of the articles.

In 1st edition D&D, there was a supplement called *OPI: Tales of the Outer Planes*. Erik and his crew have taken the concept of The World Serpent Inn found in that supplement, a tavern that had a bunch of doors that led to different worlds, and updated it to 3.5 rules. It will be used as a framework to step into a number of different worlds. Some of the worlds they will be covering are Greyhawk, Kara-Tur, Maztica, Ravenloft, Dark-Sun and Planescape. There will also be ties to the Forgotten Realms and Eberron built into the articles as well.

In the spring of 2007, they are planning a special issue that is going to focus entirely on the ecology section of *Dragon*. It will be a compilation of the ecologies. It will be a special issue and will be outside of the normal twelve issues a year that are normally published. It will be available in bookstores, on-line, game stores and through the military distribution. It will be a large issue, somewhere in the neighborhood of 150 pages.

### Moving Off the Pages

Outside of the magazine but still related to *Dragon*, Paizo will be releasing a hardcover book, 160 pages, called *The Art of Dragon* – 30 years of the world's best fantasy art. Some of the artists that will be featured in the book are Clyde Caldwell, Larry Elmore, Brom, Reynolds and a variety of different artists. It will be out in October and will cost \$39.95.

Paizo has also really branched out from the *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. Last year was the debut of their *Game Mastery* line of RPG accessories. A lot of it is d20; much of it is game system independent. These are stand alone adventures designed to be



used, for example, when the party turns left instead of when the GM expected right, and the GM has nothing to put there. Each has four unpainted metal miniatures, four map cards and a short d20 adventure.

Paizo also recently launched their item card line. The idea is that instead of just telling the characters what they get at the end of the game, you hand them one of these cards. Each card depicts a different spell, magic item, weapon, etc. On the opposite side is a blank area for them to write what the item is, what special property it may have and so on. On the bottom of the blank are is a code line that the GM can use to code the item to a specific part of the game.

Another item that is coming out in October in the *Game Mastery* line is the *Campaign Workbook*. It is a 320-page notebook for GMs that helps them track everything for their campaign. It has areas for personal information on your players, a ton of graph paper for sketching, a log for item cards, a campaign calendar, an NPC directory, an area for a campaign map, city map and a regional map. It also has 104 pages of adventure logs. The cost will be about \$13.

Paizo has also contracted with Monte Cook to create the metal miniatures line for his new campaign setting *Ptolus*. As of Gen Con, there were already ten finished at the Paizo booth, and they have at least ten more planned and hope to do more.

Looking into 2007, Erik Mona signed a deal with Robert J. Koontz, a long time writer for TSR, to do a 256-page version of one of his works in the old style of dungeon making. They are also working with some of their artists to do a compilation book of Zogonia and Downer. They will also be branching into new areas, which Erik just would not release any secrets on.

Starting this year, Paizo partnered with James Ernest of Cheapass Games and independent designer Mike Selinker, and has formed a partially owned company called Titanic Games. They will be putting out a full-color German-style board game version of *Kill Dr. Lucky*. Another game that Titanic will be putting out is *Stonehenge*, slated to come out in February 2007, retailing for about \$40. There are many other games planned by Titanic in the next year, and all should be available for no more than \$40.

## The Future of Star Wars at Wizards of the Coast

by Michael J. Thompson

The staff from Wizards of the Coast presented a panel review of upcoming products in the *Star Wars Miniatures* line and the upcoming *Star Wars Saga* roleplaying game. Because the book is still in progress, the crew was unable to answer many questions about the RPG, but what they were able to say sounded very promising.

The panel started with a presentation of the new miniature product line, including photos of existing minis and sketches of planned products. In all, 2006 and 2007 will be a very good year for *Star Wars* enthusiasts.

## For More Information...

*Savage Tide Player's Guide* PDF:

<http://paizo.com/store/brand/dragon/issues/specialIssues/v5748btpy7t7i>

Game Mastery Item Cards:

<http://paizo.com/store/byCompany/p/paizoPublishingLLC/gameMastery/itemPacks/v5748btpy7m6a>.

Compleat Encounters:

<http://paizo.com/store/games/miniatures/miniaturesForRoleplaying/compleatEncounters/v5748btpy7fx>

Dragon Compendium

<http://paizo.com/dragon/products/books/v5748btpy7pek>

Cheapass Games

[www.cheapass.com](http://www.cheapass.com)

- Released earlier this year, *Star Wars: Champions of the Force* has been the best-selling *Star Wars* minis set since the line's inception. Jedi and Sith characters feature heavily in this collection, which depicts characters from the movies, expanded universe, and video games.
- Released in September was *Star Wars: Bounty Hunters*, which of course included a good number of bounty hunter figures. This set also featured Huge figures, including the basilisk war droid ridden by a Mandalorian warrior.
- November is the planned release of the highly-anticipated *Starship Battles* line. The starter set will feature two Gargantuan figures—the super star destroyer *Executor* and the Mon Calamari star defender *Ciscount*-- plus 8 random miniatures, full-color stat cards, a large battle map, one 20-sided die, rules booklet, two Fleet Commander cards, and damage and command counters. Minis will range in size from Medium to Gargantuan, but will be of relative scale. Otherwise, the X-wing fighter and TIE fighter would be a tiny scrap of plastic compared to the super star destroyer.
- The only announced miniatures expansion set for 2007 is *Alliance and Empire*, slated for a May release. This set will be produced in celebration of the 30th anniversary of *Star Wars* and will have a strong focus on characters from the original films. Other sets are planned for 2007 but are too far in the future for an announcement.

The *Star Wars* RPG line, which has been “on hiatus” since 2004, will be relaunched with the introduction of *Star Wars: The Saga Edition* in March. It will be a d20 game designed for use with the miniatures line, but will not depend on the miniatures for play. The game will cover the Old Republic era and the Rebellion era as depicted in the six movies.

Few details were available at Gen Con, but we do know that the rules have been revised to streamline gameplay. All of the classes have been revamped, and three have been eliminated (tech specialist, fringer, and force adept). There are many new feats, and the structure for force powers has been completely redone. Instead of a number of Force skills and Force feats,

there is a single "Use the Force" skill and related Force powers that all rely on that skill. Hit points and a condition track have replaced wound points and vitality points. The rulebook will also include a world gazetteer for key planets from the movies. Future accessories will be available in 2007, but could not be discussed at the panel.

## What's new with Green Ronin?

by Michael Thompson

The staff of multi-ENnie award winning Green Ronin was on hand at Gen Con for two seminars to highlight upcoming products. Steve Kenson led a panel on the future of the *Mutants & Masterminds* (M&M) line, and later joined president Rob Schwalb and Chris Pramas for an overall discussion of their products.

### Out Now and Coming Soon

The panels began with an overview of new releases and soon-to-be released products:

- *Crisis in Freeport* is the final chapter of the Freeport storyline, in which a new Sea Lord comes to power and either brings the city into a new golden age or heralds an age of doom.
- *True Sorcery* provides a new way to use magic in d20 games, including rules on adapting for *True20 Adventure Roleplaying*, *Thieves' World* and *Monte Cook Presents: Iron Heroes*.
- *True20 Worlds of Adventure* provides four settings for your *True20* game.
- *Golden Age* provides rules, a setting, and new heroes and villains for playing *Mutants & Masterminds* in the 1930s and '40s.
- *Ultimate Power* is a sourcebook detailing every power imaginable for use in your *Mutants & Masterminds* game.

### Late 2006

Fall and winter 2006 releases were detailed next:

- *The Pirate's Guide to Freeport* will advance the Freeport timeline by five years. Unlike other Freeport products, this 256-page book will be pure background information with no rules. Future releases will allow you to use Freeport in a variety of systems. The first will be released in the fall, titled *True20 Freeport Companion*.
- *Beyond the Towers* will be Green Ronin's second Bleeding Edge Adventures product, sending adventurers into a perilous swamp.
- *The Deck of Many Things* includes 24 tarot-sized cards with art by Elaine Bettocchi.
- Three new titles are planned for the Warhammer line (created by Black Industries): *Warhammer Warfare Companion*, a more-detailed view of the world and its inhabitants; *Warhammer Tome of Corruption*, with detailed information about the powers of Chaos; and *Lure of the Liche Lord*, an adventure where players must battle the ambitions of petty princes and undead in a forgotten tomb.
- A series of *True20 Companion* books will be created,



(L to R) Rob Schwalb, Chris Pramas, and Steve Kenson of Green Ronin Publishing

allowing players and GMs to use the True20 rules in a variety of genres (modern, future, post-apocalypse, etc.).

- The *Mutants & Masterminds Pocket Players Guide* will be a condensed version of the 2nd edition rules printed in a smaller-sized book. The guide will be strictly rules-oriented, which will reduce page count and allow for a lower-priced product than the regular M&M rulebook.
- *Time of Vengeance* will be the next adventure for *Mutants & Masterminds*. Freedom City is under massive attack, and the city's popular heroes are overwhelmed. This adventure allows player characters to shine and make a name for themselves as major heroes ... if they survive.
- *Agents of Freedom* is an M&M sourcebook for spies and super agents. It will include new equipment, rules for playing spies, super agents, and police, and even reveal some of the secrets of the evil organization SHADOW.
- *Street-Level Archetypes II* (from Ronin Arts) will be a PDF-only product that provides about a dozen new character archetypes for M&M.

### Early 2007

The panel provided only a few notes on upcoming products for the first half of 2007. There are sure to be more, but the release schedule becomes hazy that far into the future.

- *Dragon Fist*, a product slated for a 2006 release has been pushed back to 2007. There is no exact release date, so it is possible it will be pushed to the second half of 2007. Chris Pramas assured the audience that this product is ongoing and has not stopped!
- The *Mutants & Masterminds Beginners Guide* will be a 64-page product to introduce new players to M&M. Characters will start as new students at the Claremont Academy, M&M's version of the *X-Men*'s Xavier's Institute for Gifted Youngsters.
- *Instant Superheroes* is a collection of about 32 detailed character archetypes, with customization and strategy information. Most of the powers and abilities will be from the core 2nd edition M&M rules, but a few will come from



*Ultimate Powers*. In those cases, information about the new powers will be explained in this book.

- *Hero High*, another M&M sourcebook, will cover roleplaying teen superheroes. Expanded details of the Claremont Academy will be covered.

- Late in the second quarter of 2007 we will see *Iron Age*, a sourcebook for M&M superhero roleplaying in the late '80s and early '90s. This period of comics' history was noted for the "grim & gritty" style of hero comics, when every super seemed to carry a big gun whether he needed to or not, major violence was all the rage, and the moral line between good and evil changed to shades of gray. This book will provide new character archetypes and detailed information about the hero group Force Ops for the Freedom City setting.

Overall, Chris Pramas and the Green Ronin team put a very positive outlook on the company's future, and the list of scheduled releases backs up their feelings. Look forward to plenty of great new material from Green Ronin in the year to come!

## The Death and Rebirth of Judges Guild

by Michael Thompson

Judges Guild is one of the oldest RPG companies in the industry, and was the first to produce supplements and adventures for the *Dungeons & Dragons* game. At its peak, the company had more than 250 products in production. Sadly, the company faced dramatic complications in the '80s that all but destroyed it. Today, however, the company is growing again. Bob Bledsaw, founder of Judges Guild, and James Mishler came to Gen Con to share their experiences.

In the early 1980s, the country's economy was in a downturn. Many people were losing their jobs, and numerous companies were going out of business. The gaming industry was not immune to financial problems, and smaller ventures and hobby shops closed as well. Judges Guild tried to maintain its status as a competitor, but circumstances would not allow for that.

Bob admits to a number of business errors, business disasters and personal problems that led to the end of Judges Guild. He had extended credit to a number of hobby stores that never paid. A Canadian-based company purchased about \$100,000 in product over three orders but failed to pay most of the cost. Internal conflicts caused strife and led to some employees stealing data from the company. At the same time, Bob's family life became extremely difficult: His mother passed away from cancer, his wife suffered from mental illness, and ultimately the couple separated and divorced. Bob also began suffering depression from the immense stress these situations created.

An unscrupulous accounting firm also charged Judges Guild for services that were never performed and for services they were not supposed to perform. The IRS began hounding the company for back taxes they allegedly owed (eventually they were found in error). With these financial problems and the poor economy, Bob was forced to sell the Judges Guild office building. This truly led to the end for the company. Further adding to the downfall, distributors holding Judges Guild's inventory (worth

in excess of \$1 million) lost his files and merchandise; some was destroyed in a warehouse fire, while other items simply disappeared. This was too much for Bob, and so he ended Judges Guild.

Fortunately, this was not the end of the story. James Mishler contacted Bob in 1999 regarding the old Judges Guild product line and asked about the prospects for a re-release. With the emergence of 3rd edition D&D and the Open Gaming License, Mishler helped Judges Guild form a partnership with Necromancer Games to bring the *City State of the Invincible Overlord* and the *Wilderlands of High Fantasy* back to the market. Necromancer Games also published a *Player's Guide to the Wilderlands* and the Judges Guild adventure *Caverns of Thracia*.

*Tegel Manor* will be the last product published in the Necromancer Games/Judges Guild partnership. In 2007, Adventure Games Publishing will release *Wilderlands of High Adventure* under license from Judges Guild and Troll Lord Games. This time, the *Wilderlands* will be revised and expanded under the *Castles & Crusades* rules system. Numerous expansions are planned. Bob is also working on two additional *Wilderlands* products: *City State of the Sea Lords*, which is mostly complete, and *City State of the Mages*, which is being developed.

Judges Guild is an important and integral part of the history of the RPG industry, and despite its near death in the '80s, the future is looking bright. We at Silven thank Bob Bledsaw for his contributions to gaming and wish him great fortune in the years ahead.

## Legend of the Five Rings News

by Joel "Agent X" Oberdieck

As a first-time attendee of a *Legend of the Five Rings* (L5R) update at Gen Con, I wasn't entirely sure what to expect. From my previous experience with company status reports, I anticipated a small gathering of loyal fans along with a few scattered members of the press such as myself, all to listen to the AEG design team set forth what it had planned for the coming year. Whatever I expected, I was completely blown away by what I experienced.

First off, the ballroom allocated to the event was packed, almost to the point of being standing-room only. Banners of *Legend of the Five Rings* factions hung around the outside of the room, each bearing the mon – a symbol or token – that many attendees wore to show their loyalties. I knew from past experience with the game that L5R players were far more intense than most collectible card game (CCG) followers, but I found myself overwhelmed by the experience of being in the midst of such an assembly. Once Todd Rowland, the current head of the L5R team, began his presentation, however, the room quickly quieted and watched as plans for the next year were revealed.

Shawn Carman (the current storyline director) summarized upcoming events in the L5R CCG. The newest expansion, *Rise of the Shogun*, will be released in September and will continue the storyline of the clash between the Emperor and

the Shogun of R  
 vying subtly for c  
 Adding to this, th  
 growing disillusion  
 and have begun t  
 further complicat  
 Empire. Mechanic  
 will feature more

For more information about the *Legend of the Five Rings*, or to keep tabs on some of those upcoming products, check out <http://l5r.alderac.com/>.

The next edition of the game, titled Samurai Edition, will be released next year. The primary conflict of this story arc will be between the Emperor and the Shogun, and the design team has promised to further streamline the game mechanics and increase player influence on the storyline. Expect more about this edition as Gen Con 2007 approaches.

Very little was said about the roleplaying game, but a few upcoming products were mentioned. First, a book tentatively titled *Creatures of Rokugan Third Edition Sourcebook* will serve as the setting's monster book, something that has been missing from L5R since 1st Edition's *Secrets of the Shadowlands*. Second, a book titled *Art of the Duel* will cover single challenges of all types in detail, from games of Go to sword duels to the death. Finally, a third product, tentatively called *Rokugan 3E*, will provide an account of Rokugani geography and culture, and will serve as a reference work for GMs.

Finally, two additional products were mentioned that are not related to the CGC or the RPG. The first is a combat board game, in the vein of *Axis & Allies* or *Risk*, called *Emperor*. The game is set during the Clan War era of L5R history and is to be released in the summer of 2007. The second product is a standalone graphic novel written by Shawn Carman. More details should be unveiled over the following year.

When their presentation ended, the design team called on all present to stand and shout a rallying cry, and then dismissed the group. I left the room in a state of shock. While I was excited by a number of the announced products, especially the board game, I was more excited by the sense of community among the fans. It reassured me that L5R is still going strong after nine years. I hope to be there for their 10th anniversary as well.





# Spookybeans: the RPG

## An Interview with co-author J. “Dregg” Carpio by Eytan Bernstein

*J. “Dregg” Carpio is the co-author of Spookybeans, “a role-playing game of gothic underground comedy comics.” He is also the author of Pulp Era for his own company, Chapter 13 Games, and has done work for a number of publishers including Eden Studios and the Silven Trumpeter.*

**1) Hi, Dregg. It’s good to work with you again and to welcome you back to our Silven community. Can you tell us about the work you’ve been doing in the RPG industry in the last few years?**

Great to be back to the community again Eytan, and good seeing you again it has been a long time since the days at I-CON. Well, my major work over the last year or so has been working on a new book for Eden Studios. Unfortunately, with the project still in production, there is little I can say about it, but it is my first major book for a mainstream company and I have been putting 300 percent into it. Other than that, I published my first indie press game, *Pulp Era: Cinematic Adventures in the Yesteryear* in 2005, and shortly after I started working on my latest project, *Spookybeans*, with graphic designer Ben Morgan. Besides writing, I am still working the convention scene here on Long Island, and recently I have been working on some really cool stuff with “Maxmike” Pondsmith of R. Talsorian Games.

**2) *Spookybeans* is a unique title for an unusual game. What was the inspiration behind the development of the game?**

I had always been a fan of Jhonen Vasquez, Roman Dirge, and an old acquaintance Serina Valentino (who was just starting out Gloom Cookie when I was trying to also break into the Gothic comic scene back in the late 90s). My first attempt at doing comics (with a Kinkos-printed B&W release), called *Kinderbat*, never really left the clubs that I sold it at back in San Francisco, so

I gave up on the idea and packed it away when I moved to NY. It was not till about 2003, when I was playing around with an idea for a cartoon RPG, that I dug up my old comics and started to dream up the idea for a game that would allow the players to roleplay out the sarcastic and destructive side of these stories.

I posted the first draft on RPG.net and NERD NYC forums and got sort of a Òho-humÓ reaction. The mechanics were nothing to write home about, and with all the innovative stuff The Forge was doing at the time, all I got was “Nice try, kid” from those who read it. Ben Morgan, who had done great graphics work for Ron Edwards and many other of the Forge authors, found my draft to have merit and signed on to help me develop it.

**3) Who do you think would enjoy this game? What is there about this game that would make someone want to play it, as opposed to another gothic or horror game?**

The game should appeal to the inner Goth in us, or the at least the hidden psychopath that dwells in the back of our minds. *Spookybeans* is not horror in the true sense: there are really no monsters except the characters themselves. The game allows the players to achieve goals by totally self destructing and doing the evils that they would only daydream of. Think of it as self-imposed slapstick comedy. You are trying to entertain by slowly beating yourself into a pulp. It is not the destructive comedy of the old *Looney Toons* from our childhoods; it is taking that to the next level. Instead of the hunted rabbit twisting the shotgun in knots to blow up the hunter’s face in a cloud of black smoke, it would be the rabbit slicing up the hunter and selling the steaks back to his lodge and watching them enjoy every bite.

**4) What is the thought behind the name of the game? What is a “spookybean?”**

The name *Spookybeans* actually comes from an old *Shadowrun* game I ran years ago. My good friend Jon Richardson (one of the authors of *Pulp Era*) came up with the name for a scary blues singer NPC that the players met frequently. When I started writing the *Kinderbat* comics, I used Mr. Spookybeans as an icon that the main character loved and had on her tee-shirts and lunchbox. Of course, when I started writing the game I was really stuck for a unique name. That’s when it hit me, and from then on the project was called *Spookybeans*. *Spookybeans* are the people who inhabit the world of the game, those few individuals who stand out from all the norms, jocks, and ravers who would put them down because they are different.

**5) Can you describe the mechanics of the game for us?**

Ben Morgan and I have really tried to make the game more suited to how it should be played. (I won’t go on my d20 rant here, but we both knew that a standardized system would not allow us to give the impact we wanted). We tapped into the genius that is Ron Edwards’ GNS model (if you don’t know GNS, head over to The Forge and read Ron’s thoughts on game design – it will really blow your mind.) and started to lay out the framework. At its core, the game is a simple binary system of successes and failures. To put it simply, the GM rolls vs, the player and he with the most successes wins. This is where “Ouchies” and “Oooh” come into play. Ouchies for the most part are action points: when a player fails the roll, he (or she) can start to degrade, self humiliate, and harm themselves in order to make what they attempted to do happen. Sometimes it comes in the package of more harm, but it will help to move the story along.

Oooh points are little treats that are gained when the player does something brilliant to make the story even that much better. There are no hit points in the game. The players play scene by scene trying to gain or lose “Tar.” Tar is the built-in mechanic that gauges how the scene is running for the players. The characters try to achieve positive Tar so the scene can end, and

sometimes to do this they need to push the limits. It is not to say that the players cannot move to the next scene with negative Tar, but if they do, things are just going to get worse. The other core mechanic is what is called Happy Happy and Doom Doom. Every player chooses what cool thing will happen to them when they end the story in the positive, and then another player chooses their Doom Doom, which of course is what evil will follow the character around if they screw things up badly. It is not a game of D&D where the goals are pretty set in stone; *Spookybeans* is a narrative-driven game where the players really need to get into character and help drive the story.

**6) Currently, the rules are available on your site <http://www.spookybeans.com/> for free. Are there any plans to create an expanded version of the rules or a set of supplements to sell at major vendors?**

Oh yes, currently the GM section and some of the art and layout are being finished. We plan to start with preorders on October 31st and release the game to the public in January of 2007. The version(s) on the web are just the playtest rules, which have got some pretty cool feedback from IPR's Brennan Taylor, and Michael & Kat Miller (of *With Great Power* fame). We wanted to make sure that this was something people would want to see on the shelves before putting our hard-earned pennies into it.

**7) The game was playtested at I-CON, and you represented it at Gen Con this year. What other events are you planning in the next year to showcase the game to prospective players?**

As always, I am at Dreamation and Dexcon (a great NJ convention that help promote indie designers each year by sponsoring free space, rooms, and meals) running my new material, and I am hoping in 2007 I will join the Forge booth at Gen Con and run the game at the mother of all conventions as an actual event. The problem is that I cannot be at every con that comes my way. I am hoping that Ben and I will bring on a few avid followers to spread the word of our games across the country. Demo teams are great, but sometimes you just want your game played by the Joe GMs and know that people just like what you have put out. The website should also have some cool bits as we get closer to press as well.

**8) What other plans are there for *Spookybeans* and its website in the near future?**

Well, Ben is adamant about getting forums up in the near future so we can speak incoherently and get updates to those who play *Spookybeans* and other Chapter 13 Press games. With Ben also getting his feet wet with Flash, we will try to add some cool games or a *Spookybeans* coloring book that you can play with online. I am thinking of putting up the Kinderbat comic in an online format as well. A lot of ideas, but little time to act on them, so we shall see. As for the game itself, well, right now we are not trying to jump the gun too much. I guess it is one of those 'play it by ear' sort of things, although the system has made me think of doing other things with it. Perhaps a Modern Pulp RPG might be in the future, but that will remain to be seen.

**9) What other projects are you working on or promoting? Can you give us some insight into what you will be doing for the next year or so?**

Well as far as promotion, I am working with the R. Talsorian "Chrome Berets" right now to work on structuring their demo support, and recently I have been promoted to the New York cell leader for the Steve Jackson Games *Men in Black*. Once I finally finish all the last bits of work on my Eden Studios project, I would like to do another bit of freelancing, but as you and I both know it is hard to get that first break. There are a lot of cool games on the market these days and I would love to add my two cents to a lot of them, but alas, freelancers are everywhere. In fact, at Gen Con I was talking to a few companies, and every time I turned a corner there were writers handing over their business cards trying to get work. One company I really would love to do some work for had six people at their booth trying to get work, so I just left them a copy of *Pulp Era* and said Call me. I have a few projects that are on my plate right now, such as the revision of *Pulp Era*. There's also a cool little idea I am calling Utopian, about a world where WWII left America a paranoid, xenophobic nation and nothing really progressed past the 1950s way of thinking. Who knows, maybe the next time Silven interviews me I will have some nice credits under my old, worn out belt.

**10) Is there anything else you'd like to say to the readers?**

Buy my books! No, seriously, I would say that in a time when our hobby is at its largest and most diverse, go out and look over all the shelves of your local game store and look at all the cool stuff that is there. The one thing that kills me to see is when people are working very hard to bring the hobby new and exciting worlds to play in, and the average gamer is still just playing that one system without any inkling to try anything new. This is what conventions are for. Put down that copy of the D&D or World of Darkness book for once and play in a demo of something that sounds cool. You might just find your new religion in that span of four hours, and give another company a reason to bring out more and more cool stuff.

Game designers, freelancers, and companies are nothing without the support and love of their audience and fans. Even if you cannot afford to go out and drop \$40.00 on a new book, see if the company in question is looking for demoers. Believe it or not, most companies are dying to have a few dedicated people to run their games for them, and in return they will give you what you need in order to make it happen. If you have a closet filled with games you will never play and need space for that new splat book, then do another gamer a favor and pass the books on, or trade them with other gamers who are in the same boat. Websites like RPG.net are a great place to trade off that collection of RPGs that are sitting there in the dark, and in return you can get something you really wanted. Also just play games, find a group, do a PBEM (play by email) with some friends, go to your local store and see if they have any events going on during the weekends.

Thank you Eytan for your time and listening to me rant!  
**Thank you Dregg for taking the time for this interview!**





# QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Page 1

## CHARACTER CREATION

### Ground rules

- ☠ No two characters can share the same traits.
- ☠ Each character must be worthy of a story.

### Overview

1. Name: Make it a good one.
2. Concept: Sum up your character in one simple phrase.
3. Thingies: Come up with one to three abilities for your character.
4. Allocate up to 15 points among your Concept and your Thingies. Each ranges from 1 to 5 (least relevant to most relevant, respectively).
5. Whatever points you have left go into Oooh.
6. Happy-Happy: Come up with a good ending for your character.
7. Doom-Doom: Everyone hand their sheet to the player on their left. Come up with a bad ending for the character you've just been handed. Now hand all the sheets back.
8. Both Happy-Happy and Doom-Doom start at 0.
9. Come up with a description, background, and other stuff of interest.
10. If you are an accomplished artist, draw a picture of your character, or if you're a talentless worm, get someone else to do it.

## DICE

- ☠ Use any dice, as long as they're even-sided.
- ☠ Odd numbers are Skulls (good).
- ☠ Even numbers are Glooms (bad).
- ☠ For playing cards, black cards are Skulls, and red cards are Glooms.
- ☠ For coins, heads are Skulls, and tails are Glooms.

## Oooh

You can spend Oooh points during a conflict to boost a roll. You can earn Oooh points by Taking Ouchies.

## OUCHIES

Ouchies turn a failed rolls into successful ones, at the expense of your character's dignity. Each Ouchie will generally be worth 1-5 Oooh points, depending on how entertaining it is. Each subsequent Ouchie must be more severe than the last, so start off small.

## UNNATURAL COINCIDENCES

You have the power to make things happen that are totally disconnected from your character. Roll your Concept during an existing Conflict, vs. an Adversity number set by the GM. If you make it, it happens, just like that. The nature of the coincidence has to be in accordance with your Concept.

## DEVELOPMENT ROLLS

You can add new Thingies to your character sheet by rolling your Concept during an existing conflict, and the number of successes (your Skulls minus the GM's Skulls) is the rating of the new Thingy, which is ready to be used right away.

## CONFLICT SYSTEM

Conflicts consist of a series of rolls, the aim of which is to knock down your opponent's Tar score.

1. Determine Stakes: What happens if you win? What happens if you lose? If you don't like the stakes, now's the time to speak up.
2. GM sets Tar for each side:

Scale of the Conflict	Starting Tar
Indy and the sword guy in <i>Raiders</i>	1
Sketchy	2
Moderate (default)	3
Detailed	4
Roddy Piper & Keith David in <i>They Live</i>	5+

3. Grab a number of dice equal to the most relevant Thingy (or Concept if it's a Coincidence or Development roll), plus any Oooh you decide to spend.
4. GM grabs a number of Adversity dice:

Adversity Level	# of Dice
Super Easy-peasy	4
Average	6
Kinda Sorta Hard	8
Really Hard	10
You haven't had an Ouchie in a while, have you?	15+

5. Everyone roll the dice. Whoever get the most Skulls wins the roll.
6. If you fail the roll, you can accept the failure, or you can opt to take an Ouchie.
7. An Ouchie reverses the number of Skulls rolled for each side for this roll only. Narrate the details of the Ouchie. The GM will award a number of Oooh points based on how severe/embarrassing/painful/amusing the Ouchie is. Each new Ouchie must meet or exceed the award of the previous Ouchie.
8. If Tar was set to 1, then go to step 13. Otherwise...
9. Subtract the loser's Skulls from the winner's, that's how many successes the winner has.
10. Subtract the successes from the loser's Tar, and add them to the winner's Tar.
11. The loser of the roll narrates the details of the exchange.
12. Repeat Steps 3-11 until one side or the other is reduced to 0 Tar, or something else intervenes that renders the whole conflict a moot point.
13. The conflict ends in a manner outlined by the stakes.
14. If you win the conflict, you earn 1 point of Happy-Happy.
15. If you lose the conflict, you earn 1 point of Doom-Doom.

## HAPPY-HAPPY AND DOOM-DOOM

At the beginning of the story, the GM sets the conditions for ending the story. When the main story is over, compare each character's Happy-Happy and Doom-Doom scores. Whichever is higher determines how each individual character ends up, narrated in a *Mallrats*-style montage. If there are victory conditions for the story itself, total up everyone's Happy-Happy and Doom-Doom, and compare to see how the story itself ends.



## QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Page 2

### EUPHORIUM'S DEMISE

Euphorium, everyone's favorite one-stop shop for all things hippie/goth/punk since 1973, is being forced to close their doors if they can't come up with \$100,000 in back rent. The store owners, Sunflower and her husband Smokey, have been friends with the locals in The Hollow for a long time, but as drug paraphernalia started to become less popular, and people started to buy their games and comics online, this small mom-and-pop store could not afford to make ends meet. Chad Bradley (the Euphorium's landlord and all-around corporate dirtbag) has found this an opportune time to kick out the hippies and tear down the store to build a franchised yuppie watering hole called "Mondays". Sunflower has three days to collect the cash or the store will be no more. Since the PCs are regulars in the shop, Sunflower offers the kids a chance to help them raise the money to stay open.

Opposing the Spookybeans are the Yuppie Youth Organization, a preppy right-wing high school club that torments our heroes on a day-to-day basis, and they will try and make it near impossible for them to raise any money by countering their efforts. The YYO is made up of all the preps, jocks, cheerleaders, and wanna-bes and rich kids at Ross Perot high school.

After 3 days of fundraising/blackmail/armed robbery mayhem, total up everyone's Happy-Happy and Doom-Doom scores. If the Spookybeans earned enough Happy-Happy points, the Euphorium is saved! If not, then the bulldozers are running...

After determining the fate of the store with the collective Happy-Happy and Doom-Doom scores, compare each character's individual totals to see where they end up.

### DRAMATIS PERSONAE

#### *The Bad Guys*

**Chad Bradley:** The president of Bradley Real Estate Ventures, LLC. Smug, smarmy scumbag. Always looks like he's ready to go play tennis. Has a really bad hairpiece. I play him like Christopher McDonald's character from Happy Gilmore.

**Pierce Worthington:** Young Republican brown-noser, Perot HS class president, and leader of the YYO. Wears navy blue suits and power ties. Spineless coward if confronted directly. I play him like David Spade's character from PCU.

**Brock Harwood:** Perot HS varsity fullback, and Pierce's personal flunky. Always wears his varsity jacket. Long on muscle, short on brains.

**Summer Johanson:** Hyper cheerleader. About as sharp as a bowling ball. Brock's girlfriend.

**Victoria Prescott:** The meanest girl in school. Victoria comes from old money, and is the worst kind of snob. Pierce's girlfriend.

**Doreen:** Moral fascist. Doreen has dedicated her life to stamping out any form of objectionable content anywhere. Imagine Tipper Gore in high school.

**Brandy, Candy, Mandy, and Claire:** YYO cheerleader bunnies. Always travel in a pack, all share one brain, and have no individual identities (or so it seems).

#### *The Good Guys:*

**Harold "Smokey" Lindenberg:** Owner of the Euphorium. A receding hairline hasn't deterred him from wearing his hair long, and he is in a constant haze.

**Arianna "Sunflower" Martin-Lindenberg:** Operator and manager of the Euphorium, and Smokey's wife. Has her head in clouds of a completely different sort.

Possible hare-brained schemes:

1. Stage a zany bank robbery.
2. Hold a bake sale.
3. Challenge the YYO to some sort of competition.
4. Just kill them.

### GM TIPS

Just a few tips for running this scenario:

- ☞ Give out Oooh points like candy, and encourage players to spend them in the same manner.
- ☞ If it seems too easy for the players, keep pumping up the Adversity, it's a direct measure of how much you want the players to fail at what they're doing.
- ☞ Tar is, above all, a pacing mechanic. If things are going too quickly, up the Tar a little on the next conflict to slow things down. Conversely, if things are dragging, lower the Tar on the next conflict and get to the good stuff.
- ☞ Don't commit to a Conflict unless you are able to live with the Stakes.
- ☞ Let the players drive the story, but be prepared to take the reins back if necessary.
- ☞ Don't be afraid to say 'No' if a player is trying to do something Truly Stupid (especially with a Coincidence or Development roll).
- ☞ If what a player is trying to do is *not* Truly Stupid (in other words, merely 'Not what the GM had in mind'), try to avoid saying 'No', when a 'Yes, but...' will do nicely.
- ☞ Let the players do whatever they want to raise the money, even if the whole town gets trashed in the process, because hey, it's funny.





NAME	
<u>Edgar Allen Ravenspoe</u>	
CONCEPT	
<u>Mopey Goth Artist</u>	<input type="text" value="5"/>
THINGSIES	
<u>Draw Anything</u>	<input type="text" value="4"/>
<u>Turn on the Waterworks</u>	<input type="text" value="3"/>
<u>                                </u>	<input type="text"/>
<u>                                </u>	<input type="text"/>
<u>                                </u>	<input type="text"/>
HAPPY-HAPPY!	
<u>Goes on to publish a series of highly successful underground comics.</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DESCRIPTION	
<u>Tall thin slightly effeminate wears victorian clothing.</u>	
NOTES	
<u>Is forced to sell out and eventually loses his soul to Corporate America.</u>	
<u>Can be a bit of a wimp if confronted directly.</u>	

NAME	
Mina Ann Ravenshoe	
CONCEPT	
Kinderbat	<input type="checkbox"/>
THINGSIES	
Lunchbox Fu	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teddy talks to me	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>
HAPPY-HAPPY	
Eventually opens her own gothic clothing store downtown.	<input type="checkbox"/>
DESCRIPTION	
Short, wears heavy boots, always carries her trusty lunchbox.	
NOTES	
Starting to get tired of having to get her brother out of trouble.	

NAME Drew		
CONCEPT <u>Mario Culture Vulture</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	
THINGS <u>Stompy Dance</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	
<u>Video Game Crawl</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2	
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	
HAPPY-HAPPY	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<u>Goes on to develop some</u>		Oooh <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STARTING
<u>controversial but highly</u>		DOOM-DOOM
<u>successful video games.</u>		<u>Gets sucked into a</u>
		<u>nightmare dimension and</u>
		<u>tortured for Eternity.</u>
DESCRIPTION		NOTES
<u>Skinny kid with spiky</u>		<u>Just a little bit creepy.</u>
<u>black hair and crazy eyes.</u>		
_____		

<p>NAME <u>Chainsaw Dave</u></p> <p>CONCEPT <u>Professional Marine</u> <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p> <p>THINGS <u>Trusty Chainsaw SAWZ</u> <input type="checkbox"/> 4</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>HAPPY-HAPPY <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><u>Discovers a hidden talent</u></p> <p><u>for ice sculpture.</u></p> <p><u></u></p> <p>DESCRIPTION</p> <p><u>Wears jeans &amp; leather,</u></p> <p><u>always a little twitchy,</u></p> <p><u>smells of motor oil.</u></p>		<p>STATS <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>OOOH <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>DOOM-DOOM <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><u>There is an unfortunate</u></p> <p><u>incident involving a</u></p> <p><u>schoolbus.</u></p> <p>NOTES</p> <p><u>His buzz is worse than</u></p> <p><u>his bite.</u></p> <p><u></u></p>
--	---	--

NAME

Lillanave St. James

CONCEPT

Spoiled Goth Princess

5

THINGS

Club Scene Diva

4

Daddy's Got Baps of Money

3

HAPPY-HAPPY

☐Becomes a big-time club promoter.

DESCRIPTION

Short, has straight black hair, always a bit sultry.

OOOH

STARTING

3

☐

DOOM-DOOM

☐Daddy cuts up all of her credit cards.

NOTES

Lil used to be best friends with YMO member Victoria until HS.

NAME

Crazy Tracy

CONCEPT

Psycho Chick

4

THINGS

Brain Melting Dialogue

3

Unwerving Stare

2

Big Knife

1

HAPPY-HAPPY

☐Goes on to pioneer a new breakthrough in Reality Physics.

DESCRIPTION

Long, stringy hair, mouth sewn shut, always carries a knife.

OOOH

STARTING

5

☐

DOOM-DOOM

☐The nice men in the white coats take Tracy away to the Crazy House.

NOTES

Always distracted by the voices in her head.

NAME

Pauline

CONCEPT

Living Dead Girl

5

THINGS

Surprisingly Sociable

4

Just a little psychic

3

HAPPY-HAPPY

☐Realizes her dream to open a beatnik coffee shop.

DESCRIPTION

Pale blue skin, yellow eyes, sometimes staggers a bit.

OOOH

STARTING

3

☐

DOOM-DOOM

☐Is forced to work the front door at SprawlMart.

NOTES

Has the unwerving habit of telling people how they're going to die.

NAME

CONCEPT

☐

THINGS

☐☐☐☐☐☐

HAPPY-HAPPY

☐

DESCRIPTION



OOOH

STARTING

☐☐

DOOM-DOOM

☐

NOTES





# Card Corner

CCG news straight from gen con

2006



by Landon Winkler

## Legend of the Five Rings and the Burning Sands

Every year, AEG (Alderac Entertainment Group) allows its players numerous opportunities to affect the *Legend of the Five Rings* storyline. Even though Gen Con is no longer home to their World Championships, it still played host to an important storyline tournament. This year, each Clan in Rokugan would receive an advisor from the Shogun or have the opportunity to express their displeasure with him by rejecting the advisor. The top sixteen was fairly diverse, with representatives of six of the ten factions.

The Dragon Clan had the strongest showing, with five members in the top sixteen, although only one survived to the top four. That Dragon, Jesse Michalica, beat out his teammate and fellow Green Bay resident Jordan Summerside, playing Mantis, in the final round.

One thing that's always striking about the *Legend of the Five Rings* tournaments is how strongly players let the story affect their actions. One player in the top sixteen had a card combination prepared to enlighten the emperor himself, hoping to unveil it during the closely watched final round. The eventual winner of the tournament wasn't willing to accept the Shogun's advisor if certain demands weren't met, and the top Scorpion player rejected the offer purely for storyline reasons.

At the same time as the top sixteen was playing out, another tournament was playing out a few tables away. *Legend of the Burning Sands* was released in 1997 as part of AEG's poorly received Rolling Thunder system, which had another expansion in '99 before giving up the ghost. That does beg the question of why twenty-five people were playing a sanctioned, sealed deck tournament of the game with others being turned away for lack of room.

As it turns out, *Legend of the Burning Sands* has a new storyline director after seven years. A fan by the name of Lucas Twyman

was able to convince the AEG staff to crown him as the new director and, regardless of whether they thought he was joking at first, they are holding up their end of the promise spectacularly.

The tournament decided two points, one within the Burning Sands and one in Rokugan. In the Burning Sands, the tournament determined which faction captured the Ebonites' black stone after the Awakening. In Rokugan (and this is where the support from AEG comes in) one Clan will learn the fate of the Prophet Mekhem, who the Rokugani know as Shinsei. Not bad for a game that hasn't had an expansion since '99.

And in a lot of ways, both tournaments reflect what the two games are all about: the story. After a weekend of CCG players competing for big money prizes, it's refreshing to watch players discussing where their loyalties lie and what sort of message they want to send to the Shogun.

## A Game of Thrones World Championship

For those not familiar with it, *A Game of Thrones* is both a series of excellent novels by George R.R. Martin and a CCG of the same name by Fantasy Flight Games. Some of you have probably also seen *Sword and Sorcery's* massive d20 hardcover for the setting as well.

The World Championship of *A Game of Thrones*, like many others, was held at GenCon this year. Unlike in other CCG competitions, the field was very even between the major factions. Even agendas (additional cards that start in play and reward certain deck styles) were not overwhelming, with a third of the competitors not using them at all.

Plenty of players from the championship, and many others beside, were participating in side drafts of *A Game of Thrones's* new *Iron Throne* Edition that was released at Gen Con. The immediately noticeable feature of this set is a new card face, better showing off the art and more clearly designating houses and card types.

According to Eric Lang (head designer behind this game, the *Call of Cthulhu* CCG, and the upcoming *Mutant Chronicles* miniatures game due out around April), the new *Iron Throne* Edition has a “back to basics” focus and is edging away from more complex abilities to focus on the game’s core mechanics.

All in all, now sounds like a great time to jump into *A Game of Thrones* if you’ve been thinking about it. Eric Lang gave one caveat that probably rings true for us RPG fanatics: the game isn’t about what *did* happen in the books, it’s about breaking out of the storyline and seeing what could have happened. He also recommended the column “R&D Corner” at [www.agameofthrones.com](http://www.agameofthrones.com) for catching up on the history and mechanics of the CCG.

## Call of Cthulhu CCG Championship

The Call of Cthulhu collectible card game, much like the RPG, is a game with a close-knit community of players. The championship at Gen Con this year was small, but friendly, with high-ranking players from last year’s championship mixed together with a few new players.

The top eight players, appropriately enough, held a lot of Cthulhu decks. Chris Long, the eventual victor, piloted a deck that allied the Cthulhu and Hastur factions for optimal madness.

Tournament players seemed particularly excited by the direction Fantasy Flight Games is taking the Call of Cthulhu card game. Instead of traditional CCG sets with randomized boosters, Fantasy Flight Games will release “Asylum Decks” that contain a fixed format of cards. According to Eric Lang, lead designer of this game, the *A Game of Thrones* CCG and others, the Asylum Decks won’t have any of the normal “filler.” Instead, each card will be the equivalent of a good rare from a normal CCG expansion.

In other words, a single purchase will get Call of Cthulhu CCG players a set of what would be the best rare cards. Not everyone relishes chasing after that last rare, and even players who have never touched the CCG seemed interested at the prospect.

And perhaps, if the Asylum Decks are successful, other CCGs will present the option to gamers not interested in collecting.

## The Spoils Open Beta Tournament

Collectible card game players have seen a lot of games advertising fabulous cash prizes in recent years. *The Spoils* took this to a new level, giving away two \$2,500 prizes at Gen Con to winners of the beta tournament, as well as iPods and other various awards. The game won’t be released until November, but Tenacious Games is already putting a lot of money on the line.

This makes a bit more sense when you look more closely at *The Spoils*, which is being touted as a Tournament Card Game. The game’s main (some would say “only”) selling point is its competitive play aspect. This Open Beta was the designers’ way of testing the game in a tournament setting before releasing it into the wild, when even more money will be on the line.

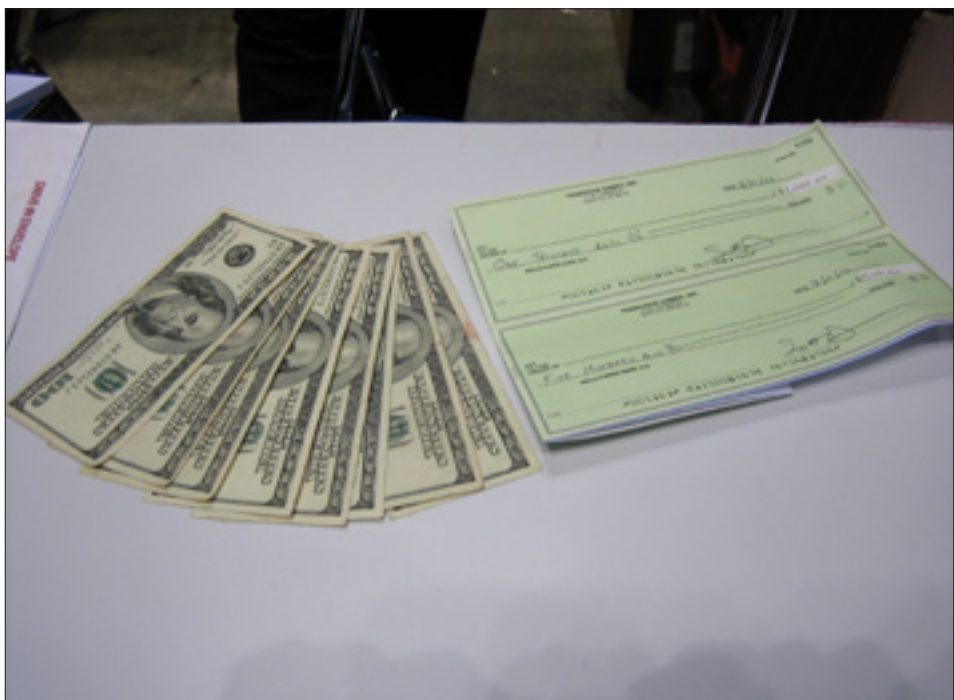
Gameplay in *The Spoils* is built around factions. Each faction has a very specific flavor, unique from the others. The Gearsmiths have a Victorian steampunk spin, much like *Girl Genius*. The Warriors are overly muscled, under-brained fighters typical of many D&D campaigns, but with dragons and guns to back them up. Trying to take in the flavor of the game as a whole, it’s a jumbled mess; but focusing on each faction provides a very interesting, coherent feel.

Everyone who sat down at the tournament picked up the game quickly and settled into competitive play. Watching the tournament, it became obvious that the game is designed to test skills. The resource system and drawing mechanics seem focused on minimizing luck and making sure the game doesn’t run out of steam.

Players’ opinions were consistently good, even among those who fell short of the monetary rewards. They said the game was easy to learn if you knew *Magic: The Gathering* or the *Vs.* system, its two closest relatives. Each player I spoke to also said that the game was very good at testing skills in a tournament setting.

One thing no one mentioned, however, was the game’s flavor or setting. Perhaps it was the sketchy concept art used for the beta cards, but some players seemed unconcerned with the flavor and even the names of cards. Perhaps it won’t get in the way of tournament play, but a few gamers indicated they’d be sticking with their traditional CCGs for this reason.

Cash and blank checks, waiting to be claimed by the winner of *The Spoils*





## EVE CCG Release Championship

For those not familiar with *EVE: The Second Genesis*, it's a new collectible card game by CCP Games, set in the universe of *EVE Online*. It's a far future setting, where player-run factions clash both militarily and economically. In the CCG, you take the role of the head of one of these factions, trying to subvert or crush all opposition.

On Saturday, the *EVE* portion of the CCG hall was packed. Half an hour before the tournament began, dozens of players were already lined up to enter. By the time everyone was processed through, over 120 gamers were participating, barely fitting into the allotted space.

After a minor snag with first round pairings, the tournament ran like clockwork. There were surprisingly few rules questions, especially for a completely new game, probably a result of most of the game text being loaded on the cards rather than hiding in the rulebook. Even between rounds the area stayed packed, with competitors playing quick side games, or talking excitedly about the cards they were going to hunt down after the tournament.

Pierre Malherbaud, also known for his accomplishments in *Magic: the Gathering*, took home the \$2,000 top prize. Every player got at least six boosters for his time, and others in the top eight got cash prizes ranging from \$450 to \$1,400.

In game, it was the Minmatar faction that carried the tournament. Of the top eight, a whopping six were Minmatar and the remainder Caldari. The *EVE* staff seemed to expect this, with the Minmatar being easy to pick up and loaded to the gills with direct damage.

One thing the *EVE* team was not expecting, however, was how many people brought sophisticated, customized decks to the tournament. With the competition itself being free and cash prizes being awarded, they had expected many players to bring starter decks straight out of the box or untweaked piles of cards. There may have been a few who did, but I was not able to find them. The players I spoke to had already spent hours playtesting and improving their decks. And everyone had picked up at least a few more cards for an edge. Some bought a few boosters while others sheepishly admitted they had already spent hundreds on their new addiction. Most of them planned for the long haul and a few picked up extra starters to get their friends at home hooked.

Judging by the reactions of people playing in this tournament, *EVE CCG* will definitely be one to watch. People who had foresworn CCGs were sitting across from people who hate science fiction, both groups enjoying themselves. That, to me, is the mark of a great game.

## Warlord Medusan Challenge

One of the unique things about the *Warlord CCG* is the challenge program. Players at local stores have tournaments for the rights to challenge an Overlord deck, one led by a special character with a few "overpowered" tricks. Those who defeat an Overlord are able to go to a larger convention and challenge the Dragon Lords, who are far more overpowered. And those who defeat a Dragon Lord can go on to challenge the unique Medusan Lords at major cons. Only one copy of each Medusan Lord deck exists, to be given to whoever eventually defeats it. When defeated in this challenge process, the lords themselves die in the storyline of the game.

Three Medusans were present at Gen Con to take challenges: Majeral, a powerful necromancer with an army of ghouls; Far um Far, a warrior probably better described as a whirlwind of steel; and Gwyr'neth-Ra, a very large and very angry dragon. None were defeated. The best progress I saw was when Far um Far was dealt four wounds. The most crushing defeat was when Gwyr'neth-Ra had won initiative. He ended up stunning the opposing Warlord in the front row and left him with no allies, thanks to a mighty breath weapon, all as his first action of the match. The Medusans were, as always, far more likely to hand out crushing defeats than find themselves in close calls.



At the only white tablecloths in the entire CCG hall, players match up during one *The Spoils* tournament.





Two of the three Medusan Lords present at Gen Con. Left (in the pimp hat) is Majeral, with Far um Far in the center seat. The vacant seat on the right belonged to Gwyr'neth-Ra, played by Mike Leader. Silven's thanks go to Mr. Leader for his help on this article.





# Phantasmos

The dream rages, a new dimension in d20 gaming is revealed.  
Travel the dreamworld of Somneiros, battle the demons of nightmares.

Do you dare to sleep?

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# Jamming to the Mario Brothers: Gamer Culture Meets the Symphonic Hall

by Elizabeth R.A. Liddell

There is one thing you absolutely need to know about Video Games Live. GO! If you get the chance, even if you have to buy tickets six months in advance and drive three hours to get there, don't pass it up!

And now I'll give you a taste of why.

The premise of the Video Games Live (VGL) concert is simple. Take the music from popular video games, arrange it for a symphony, and perform it with a live symphony orchestra. Add to that basic idea an array of special effects: laser lighting and video clips from the games, interviews with the composers, live-action characters running across the stage, and – of course – live-action video games! That's the basic idea.

This year, Gen Con worked with the VGL staff to arrange two concert dates on the Friday and Saturday nights of Gen Con. While both nights have so many events that it's hard to pick only one, Silven managed to send not one, but two reporters to Saturday's show. Both Landon J. Winkler and I came back raving about the performance; and even though I've been to hundreds of concerts (including Howard Shore conducting the *Lord of the Rings* symphony), this might well have been the best I've ever seen – I'd go again in a heartbeat!

The guys running the show know their audience. While a normal symphony concert might have wine and cheesecake available before the concert, or present a pre-concert lecture on the upcoming music, the VGL concert has games! Fans played old-school stand-up arcade games, where *Centipede* was the favorite, alongside the not-yet-released *Guitar Hero II*.

There's also a costume contest before the show. Fans showed up dressed as anime characters, game characters or both, with costumes ranging from the quick-and-simple to elaborate recreations including outrageous hair and oversized weapons. The winner of the Saturday night contest was a terrific rendition of Axel from *Kingdom Hearts*, complete with to-scale spiked chakram.

Upon entering the concert hall, a renovated movie theatre (from the days when they made gorgeous theatres!), fans were greeted by the stage setup: an eerily-lit stage with a large screen in the center above the orchestra, on which the VGL logo sat amid swirling smoke. This was a strange experience for me, something of a blend between the usual symphony pre-concert sounds (instruments tuning and warming up) and a completely different visual scene.

The content of the concert varies from performance to performance. Our program began with a piece that I imagine is in every VGL concert, a "Retro-Classic Arcade Medley," with music from *Pong*, *Donkey Kong*, *Dragon's Lair*, *Tetris*, *Frogger*, *Gauntlet*, *Space Invaders*, and more. Other pieces covered familiar games such as *Mario*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Metal Gear*

Axel, of *Kingdom Hearts*, winner of Saturday night's VGL Costume Contest.







The concert hall of the Hilbert Circle Theatre, home of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, set for the start of the Video Games Live concert.

*Solid*, *World of Warcraft*, *Everquest*, *Myst*, *Kingdom Hearts* and *Advent Rising*. A special feature combined footage from both the game and the movie *Tron*. The program also included music from a lesser-known game, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and the long-time favorite *Castlevania*.

A special feature of the concert came along with the music from the *Legend of Zelda* games. Alongside footage from past games, the audience got to see a huge amount of gameplay, some of it unreleased elsewhere, from the upcoming *Twilight Princess* game. Announced over two years ago and repeatedly pushed back, this game is highly anticipated among fans of the *Zelda* series. Getting to see these previews was quite a treat, and many audience members commented favorably on it.

One particularly memorable piece was the music from *Medal of Honor*. Instead of being performed to the video game footage that the other games featured, this game's visual material consisted entirely of original footage from World War II. Much of it was film that is not widely publicized, making the images new and touching to the audience as they heard the familiar music from the game. A few fans commented that they had

wanted to see some footage from that game as well, but everyone was struck by the emotional weight of the piece.

Between the various pieces of music, announcer Tommy Tallarico engaged the audience in a number of activities. First, he singled out a member of the audience and brought him up to the stage, giving him a black shirt. Once the shirt was donned, the fortunate man was handed "his button" and told to face the screen towards the back of the stage. The screen showed the opening for *Space Invaders*, and we could all see that the back of this guy's shirt was the ship for the game. It was explained that he would have to run back and forth across the stage to control the ship, and that he had a minute and a half to play. The crowd roared, and he didn't do half-badly – he was even given a rather impressive PC sound system as a prize!

Another game played involved two audience members. One was a sixteen-year-old girl, and the other was a man closer to the age of sixty! In turns, they were handed controllers and given the opportunity to play *Frogger* on the big screen, competing for a cutting-edge laptop computer. While neither had really played *Frogger* before, the teenage girl ended up winning. Her competitor, with the distinction of the second high-score of the night, was awarded a consolation prize: a copy of the game so that he could practice!

A feature of many of the VGL concerts is a young man known primarily as the Video Game Pianist. His claim to fame comes

from an internet-circulated video of him sitting blindfolded at a piano playing a perfect rendition of the original *Super Mario Bros.* theme. At this particular concert, he awed the audience with a piano medley of several of the *Final Fantasy* themes, and ended the show with a rousing, racing finale of the *Mario* themes that made him famous (although this performance was sans blindfold!).

As the concert finished up, the audience was on its feet and cheering madly, but with a tiny chord of disappointment. Of all the music that had been played, one major piece had been left out – *Halo*. So it was to the audience's delight that, as the applause began to die down, the conductor brought up from the audience the composer of the music to that game and introduced him. "Well, since you're here," he began, and as the audience cheered, he turned to the orchestra and asked casually, "Anyone know *Halo*?" The crowd roared and the music began, satiating the audience that wanted just one more piece.

After the concert, several of the composers who were in attendance, along with the Video Game Pianist, conductor Jack Wall and announcer Tommy Tallarico settled down in the lobby for a Meet & Greet session, where fans could chat, get autographs and take pictures. We had the opportunity to meet Sean Michael Fish, one of the designers for *City of Heroes* and *City of Villains*; Billy Martin, composer for *Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones*; and Mike Salvatori, the composer for *Halo*, who I found out, while chatting, is the father of a classmate of one of our Silven Press Team members.

As a performer myself, I was particularly interested in the demographic of this concert. Classical musicians generally know that our style of music is rapidly fading out as our primary audience (consisting largely of older people) is physically dying off. At this concert, however, I couldn't find one person who looked like a season ticketholder. Instead, I saw teenagers and young adults in jeans and t-shirts. Quite a few people were dressed for the costume contest. The oldest members of the audience looked as though their kids had dragged them along (and some admitted to it). Furthermore, every audience member I talked to felt that putting music like this into a symphonic setting was more likely to get the "gamer" generation more interested in classical music as a whole – encouraging news for us performers!

I talked to everyone I could get my hands on before the concert, during intermission, and afterwards. Everyone was very excited



Mike Salvatori, composer of the renowned music in the *Halo* series of games

## Kids, Video Games, and the Symphony

I had the chance to talk to one very young man before the concert. His name is River, and he's eight years old. He says he got to go to a symphony for a field trip once, and another time a quartet came to his school and played "something by Beethoven or Benjamin Franklin." He plays lots of video games, and he was pretty sure he'd recognize a lot of the music. I asked, was he excited? "Sort of," he replied, and Dad chimed in, "It's a new generation, it takes a lot to excite them!"

to be there – I didn't see a single dour face, and everyone was more than happy to answer a few questions. To my surprise, I only encountered a few people who had never been to a symphony before. Many teenagers said that they had attended concerts and even operas of their own volition. People's favorite pieces depended on the games they played, but *Halo* and *Legend of Zelda* were two of the recurring requests.

If you'd like to learn more about the Video Games Live concert series, see the official photos from the concerts, join their mailing list, or see their concert schedule, check out their website at [www.videogameslive.com](http://www.videogameslive.com).





A fan has the shirt on his back signed by the Video Game Pianist!

## The Musician's Review

While I was blown away by the concert as a whole, there's a little part of me that can't put aside the symphony, no matter what. So, for all those classical musicians out there, here's a quick review of the performance itself, flashy effects aside.

The Indianapolis Symphony is good, and it showed with this concert. The style of music presented in games often requires some strange harmonies and rough passages. The horns had a tough part in general, with several pieces including high glissando rips cutting through a wall of sound. There were several well-sung vocal solos, but the first oboe was somewhat weak for its several solo parts.

The symphony showed its strength at following a conductor, since they were following a conductor whose movements were dictated largely by coordinating with a video, which only he could see. Furthermore, the performers were not shielded from the lighting effects, which meant they were not only performing music in a vastly different style than their usual repertoire, but were doing so under intense distraction.

It was good to see that the members of the symphony approached this concert the same way they would approach a concert of standard classical material. There was no "dressing down," and the musicians seemed to be every bit as professional as they would have been for any other concert. There was no impression that they were taking the music any less seriously because it wasn't the traditional fare. This struck me as especially important, since a concert like this has the potential to bring a whole new audience into the concert halls, but only if the performers take it seriously.

## Do I Know What I'm Talking About?

So you know where I'm coming from, let me provide a bit of background on myself. I hold a Master's degree in music performance and have played in orchestras at varying professional levels for about a decade. I have been a video gamer since *Sonic The Hedgehog* came out for the Sega Genesis, and spent many years prior watching my older brother play games back to the original Nintendo and the obscure Sega Master System. So I have a fair bit of background in both live symphonic performances and electronic games, meaning that the Video Games Live concert was right up my alley.

I've been aware of the VGL project for several years. A friend emailed me a link at some point and I wound up on an email list, getting updates on upcoming concerts. While there were a few performances in areas close enough that I could have gone, I never made the effort. But now that I've been to one of the shows, I can't believe that I hadn't gone before. The next time a performance comes through Chicago, you can look for me there!

by Elizabeth Koprucki

This year's Gen Con theatrical play, *Dungeons & Data*, followed a gaming group whose members plug themselves into a virtual reality simulation of their roleplaying campaign.

To get that far, though, the players have to infiltrate a high-tech lab. Some player/character confusion ensued as one player became convinced he could grab the lab's keys from a sleeping security guard – just because his rogue could do so.

When the players did manage to get into the lab and plug in, they found themselves followed by Mr. Hankie, one of their boss's cronies. The villain in the VR dungeon, Lord Roperus, was based on the boss, Mr. Roper. Roperus convinced Hankie to be his henchman without too much difficulty.

Before they entered the dungeon, players programmed it not to deal actual damage. But Roperus and Hankie had other ideas and hacked the parameters, trapping the players inside.

Meanwhile, the players explored the dungeon. One even had to fight his urge to narrate it, GM-style. Another, a guy who plays a female character in the campaign, ended up looking like himself instead of his female character – but was still wearing her chainmail bikini. The others quickly got him to change clothes.

Unable to stop the group, Roperus and Hankie decided they needed some fresh evil plans. At this point, it was time for audience participation as they called up four people to help them scheme. The people had various amusing ideas for defeating the adventurers, but Roperus eventually settled on the most powerful spell of all: *Summon Chuck Norris*. He even tested it out on his fellow schemers; they were all swiftly dispatched by invisible roundhouse kicks.

In the meantime, the party discovered they were stuck and realized the only way out was to finish the dungeon and defeat Roperus. Between them and their goal was the rest of the dungeon, including the fearsome beholder (portrayed by a round helium-filled balloon with an eye drawn on it). Finally, the adventurers found and defeated Roperus, who it turned out, could only cast *Summon Chuck Norris* once per day.

A few times during the play, the cast gave out swag (donated by sponsors) – at the beginning, after Roperus and Hankie conspired, and to the audience members who helped scheme. (Your intrepid reporter caught a booster pack of Star Wars miniatures.)

After the play I talked to Steve Bartell, who wrote and directed *Dungeons & Data* and played one of the party adventurers. He's been involved with producing the Gen Con play for five years, and has written and directed it for the past three. He said that some sort of Gen Con play has been going on for at least 10 years. It was originally done by TSR and presented at

the Plankinton Theater when Gen Con was still in Milwaukee. The previous year, no one performed the play, and people complained. Steve formed the Gen Con Indy Theatre Company to keep it going.

He said the group goes out of its way to make the play cheesy, including such "effects" as the balloon beholder. This is also why the cast members read from their scripts onstage. (The fact that casting often comes down to the wire plays a part, too.) The group has enjoyed a good reception through its entire run, and although this year was the smallest audience they've seen in a while, everyone seemed to enjoy the performance.



## The Comedy Music Showcase by Michael J. Thompson

One of the entertainment highlights at Gen Con on Saturday night was the Comedy Music Showcase, hosted by the great Luke Ski. The show featured song parodies and original comedy music from one of the newest stars of *The Dr. Demento Show*.

The show opened with Devo Spice of the group Sudden Death, who featured several hip-hop tunes about technology and its ability to drive us insane. Of particular note was his ode to spam e-mail, appropriately titled “Spam.” As he sang about the thousands of types of spam cluttering his mailbox, the background music would turn into Monty Python’s classic Viking “Spam” song. His observations on “every meeting at every corporation ever” and the thrill of computer crashes at inopportune times were hilarious and eerily accurate.

Worm Quartet, who is actually one man despite the band name (“There used to be four of us!”), was the next performer. He goes by the name Shoebox, wears his hair in a long mullet, looks twice the size of any normal (and sane) man, and constantly moves on stage while grinning maniacally. His background music sounds like the twisted offspring of ’80s hair bands and old 8-bit videogames, but his lyrics – often at a manic pace – are hilarious. Some initial sound problems (the music volume was a little too high for his vocals) did not dampen his performance, which included an eclectic mix of tunes. His opener, “Great Idea for a Song,” is a hate song dedicated to everyone’s ex-girlfriend. His best song of the night was “I’m Not a Girl,” which has been in Dr. Demento’s “Funny Five” list for weeks. The audience had a great time with the participatory song “What Your Parents Think All Your Music Sounds Like.” As Shoebox says, “it’s guaranteed to send you to hell.”

The performance closed with the great Luke Ski, who performed a number of favorites accompanied by his fangirls (dressed in Luke Ski cheerleader outfits), Sudden Death, Worm Quartet and Carrie Dahlby. Songs included “A Man Named Jayne,” based on the TV series *Firefly*; “Map Light”; and “Star Wars Homesick Prequel Blues,” based on the Bob Dylan song “Subterranean Homesick Blues.” Luke wrapped up the night with the lengthy treatment of the “original” version of *Star Wars* from 1977, in which George Lucas and John Williams steal the music from an upcoming musical instead of creating an original score. The result: “Grease Wars,” featuring Carrie Dahlby as Princess Leia. In about 15 minutes, Luke Ski parodied every song from the movie *Grease* to tell *Star Wars: Episode IV: A New Hope*.

Overall, the Comedy Music Showcase was a success. This was the first-ever Gen Con show and will probably become an ongoing event in years to come. Friday Night Live: Comedy! ...

## At Ten Paces by Elizabeth Koprucki

Friday Night Live at Gen Con took on a swashbuckling feel as Keelhauled Studios presented the Keelhauled Pirates, Nigel and Bluebeard. The duo took the stage to help reinvent the modern pirate and to offer Gen Con attendees tips on how to look and act truly piratical.

Nigel and Bluebeard (who often introduce themselves with a Rosencrantz and Guildenstern twist by mixing up their names) welcomed pirate wannabes to the decks of “The Debaucherous Maiden” for their comedy show. The pair performs at a lot of conventions, and even had a booth in Artists’ Alley at Gen Con. Many of their jokes drew on their convention experiences.

The show played to a packed room, and the over-18 crowd definitely seemed to enjoy the evening and atmosphere.

A running gag throughout the night focused on the meanness of people from Detroit. The two pirates joked about Detroit natives being so mean that they regularly eat people. Nigel even grabbed his enormous wooden spoon to demonstrate how they dig into a big bowl of “Kellogg’s Frosted Man Flakes” every morning. The spoon came from his grandmother, he said, who told him when he was just a little pirate that it came from giant cannibals. Nigel said he was scared until he realized that giant cannibals only ate other giants, and thus he was safe. She rewarded him with the spoon because he figured it out.

The pirates also talked about Canadians and their kindness, particularly when one of the pirates was found lying in a hallway after drinking too much rum. Some Canadians were found in the audience, leading to jokes about how 2d6 Canadians always show up wherever Nigel and Bluebeard go.

At one point, the pirate pair called a man from the audience up to learn how to be a pirate. This basically involved holding the large wooden spoon and propositioning a woman from the audience in his cheesiest deep voice. The man needed a couple of tries, but Nigel and Bluebeard eventually pronounced him properly piratical. (The woman he propositioned seemed pretty enthusiastic about the attention as well.)



# Cardhalla

## The Ultimate House of Cards

by Elizabeth R.A. Liddell

Wandering the halls of Gen Con toward the Miniatures Room, you probably noticed the towering variants of the traditional “house of cards.” Cardhalla, as this informal event is known, is a reserved space where CCG cards are provided for enterprising individuals to build massive creations – with the sole purpose of tearing them down in the name of charity.

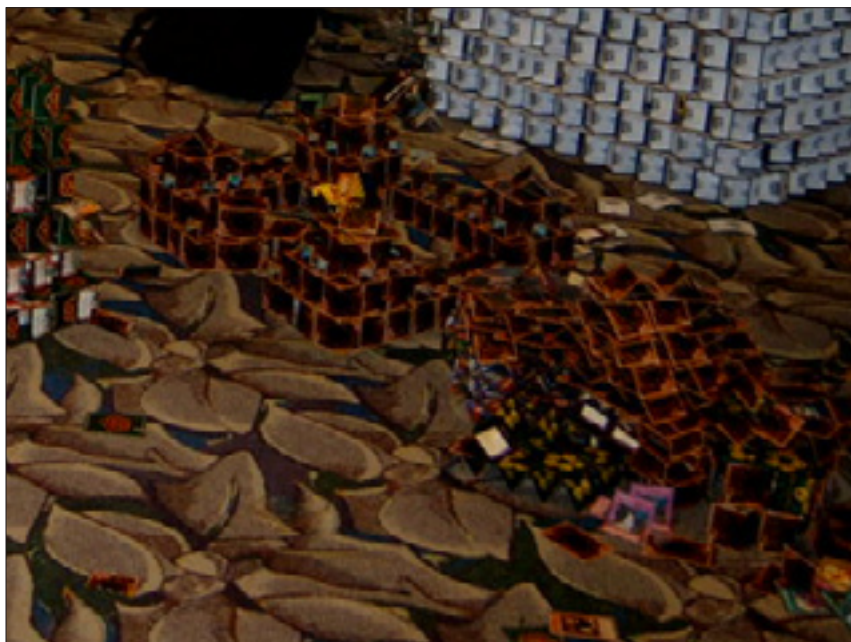
The cards are all donated, and the free event is open to everyone 24 hours a day, starting at 8 a.m. Thursday, the first day of the convention. The teardown begins late Saturday, when people make a \$1 donation for the opportunity to throw loose change to bring down the card creations.

The event brings in more than \$500 per year – a great deal of it in change. Each year, Gen Con LLC gives the money to charity. This year, the group picked Rupert’s Kids, a program started by *Survivor* winner Rupert Boneham that helps Indianapolis-area teenagers.

### Rupert’s Kids

Rupert’s Kids was the official Gen Con Indy charity for 2006. Events with proceeds going to charity worked with this group, and there were also drop boxes for random donations. Rupert’s Kids works with young people, mostly ages 18-24, through programs such as landscaping and home renovations, teaching them skills and values to help them lead better lives. For more information, check out [www.rupertskids.org/index.php](http://www.rupertskids.org/index.php).

If there’s space, they will build







# Dork of the Rings

by Jeffrey E. Thetford, contributions by Kelly Devita

*Dork of the Rings is a spoof on the film trilogy adapted from JRR Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, produced by Richardson Productions, co-written by Michael Kouroubetes, and directed by Jack Peterson in association with Somehow Cinema.*

*Approx. 100 minutes.*

*Some of the cast and crew include: Steve Christopher (Abscond the Elfis), Circus-Szalewski (Scroottum), Bryce Cone (Frudo Buggins), James Flannery (Ham), Victoria Floro (Femowen), Shayne Golden (Legoblocks the Elfis), Jim Hall (Arogant the Wrangler), David Kiefer (Randolf the Wizard), Jesse Limon (Bordandqueer), Sean McCormick (Gimpi the Dweeb), James Lowe (Internet Troll/Webmaster/Visual Effects), Bob Lee (Visual Effects), James Pickens (Writer/Producer/Cinematographer/Visual Effects), Michael Kouroubetes (Writer/Producer/Actor), Ian Strandberg (Art Coordinator/Actor), Kevin McInerney (Producer/Actor), Lu Ann Richardson (Producer), and Tim Richardson (Writer/Director/Producer).*

The movie follows Frudo Buggins, Ham, and Scroottum in the Land of Muddle-Earth on their journey to return the ring of circular credit to the headquarters of Dork Mart, in Bank Boom, in order to vanquish Mauron. Along the way they enlist the help of Arogant the Wrangler, Legoblocks the Elfis, Bordandqueer, Gimpi the Dweeb, Princess Femowen and Randolph the Wizard.

Right from the opening credits, *Dork of the Rings* is a delight to watch. The lengths that the writers of this film have gone

through to make each moment a parody of the *Lord of the Rings* is impressive. Although *Dork of the Rings* is a very low-budget film, the director and cast members have done an amazing job of cultivating what will become a cult classic among true gamers and lovers of fantasy. The crew and actors on the film had nothing but wonderful things to say about the development of the movie. And, since it was low budget, many of the actors had other jobs on the set as well as their roles in the film, but there is no indication that tempers were lost during production. All those involved genuinely seemed to have had a wonderful time creating this film.

However, the tongue and cheek tribute to the legacy of the *Lord of the Rings* loses steam in the last fifteen minutes of the film. It's as if the writers did not have an ending to the film planned out and threw together a last-minute take on the underlying homosexual undertones that are carried (successfully, I might add) throughout the movie. Unfortunately, this is disjointed and incongruous with the rest of the film. This is a let down because the entire movie up to this point is hilarious and well-written. The ending aside, *Dork of the Rings* delivers what it promises: nearly 100 minutes of laughs, one-liners and tongue-in-cheek frivolity that any gamer or fantasy-lover would enjoy. On the roll of the percentile dice, I give *Dork of the Rings* a 95% chance of success.

You can find more information about the film at [www.dorkoftherings.com](http://www.dorkoftherings.com).





# THE ART OF URBAN ADVENTURING, ACCORDING TO MONTE COOK

by Elizabeth R.A. Liddell

Having run several campaigns within the bounds of one city for almost a decade, Monte Cook could easily be described as a master of the urban campaign. In a Gen Con seminar tied to the release of *Ptolus: Monte Cook's City by the Spire*, he explained the art and technique of running a successful urban campaign. This article is a recap of that seminar, bringing Monte's insight to you without the discomfort of a chilly, crowded room with too few chairs!

## Why Play an Urban Campaign?

This was the first question posed by Monte. Why would you want to run an urban campaign rather than a traveling, continent- or world-spanning game?

A big downside of a continental campaign is that the characters may run into several important NPCs, but they never return. It's the same with locations. But in an urban campaign, NPCs can keep coming back, giving the players a chance to learn and develop an interest and even an attachment to them. In many cases, the players themselves will seek out an NPC – something that rarely happens in a broader setting.

Another advantage to the urban campaign is the handling of knowledge. Players get the opportunity to find things out about the setting on their own, rather than being informed by the GM as they pass through the city's gates. Players also gain some responsibility for keeping tabs on that information, taking some of the burden off the GM's shoulders.

On the other hand, the GM gains an additional task of establishing what the characters do know so that they can act accordingly. For example, a character may try to go through a window. A GM needs to know whether the windows are glass or open air, and whether they open or not. Are there shutters? Details like this become far more important in an urban campaign.

One of Monte's suggestions for helping with this is to start the campaign with a handout for the players, giving them the lowdown on important details. You might want to include a list of names such as the leader of the city, the ruler of the nation, and notable personalities. Even if the details aren't particularly relevant at lower levels, information may become more important as characters advance, and every little bit adds flavor to the setting.

## What to Discuss?

At the beginning of the seminar, Monte asked the audience how many people were present because they wanted to learn about running an urban campaign in general, compared with how many were there just to hear more about *Ptolus*. When the majority answered for either the former or both, Monte took the discussion in a broader scale of technique, using the city of Ptolus as an example rather than the center of the discussion.

One more strong point about the urban adventure is that it can actually make use of the "random encounter" concept. In a broader-scale campaign, a random encounter is very often the result of a d100 roll on a massive chart; but in the urban adventure, it's more a side effect of the events going on in the city that shape the players' perceptions and add flavor and depth to the game.

For example, when the players walk by a certain part of town, they might encounter kids on the rooftops spitting on them as they walk by. The next time they pass through, perhaps they're attacked by a street gang, and the time after that they see a building on fire and no one taking any action about it. While these events are unconnected and, from the players' perspective, are seemingly random, they help convey – without a boring and dry explanation by the GM – the idea that this is a really bad part of town.

## Character Classes in the Urban Setting

At first glance, it may seem that the urban campaign setting favors some base classes over others. The bard and the rogue are prized, while the ranger and druid seem to be a little out of their element. This obstacle, however, can be overcome with a little creativity.

Any city has cats, dogs and rats running about, and most have some number of horses, and perhaps other utility animals. There are also parks, gardens and lawns, from simple patches of grass to elaborate gardens in the courtyards of the noble houses. A druid or ranger can easily adapt to such an environment – the player just has to be a little more creative.

Other classes that appear to have the immediate upper hand are somewhat balanced in a setting like Ptolus. For example, a handful of spells are outright illegal, such as *invisibility*,



### Why Don't Challenge Ratings Apply for an Urban Setting?

The standard Challenge Rating (CR) or Encounter Level (EL) for an encounter in a standard setting is based on the idea that the party's progress is linear. The CR itself is calculated based on the theory that the party will go through four encounters per day, without much of a chance to recover between them. But in an urban setting, the characters are far more likely to go through one big skirmish and then take the rest of the day off, giving them the chance to regain their spells and special abilities, and gain a few hit points or visit the nearby temple for a full healing.

What this translates into is the fact that a party in an urban campaign can tackle an encounter of much higher level than the numbers show, since a party might end a battle with only two conscious members, both with single-digit hit points and poisoned. After a trip to the clerics and a good night's sleep, they're as good as new.

*charm person*, *detect thoughts* and any other mind reading or compulsion magic. And with magic being so prevalent, a shopkeep isn't going to be astounded when someone uses *mage hand* to lift an item from his shop – he's going to have scrolls, spells and wards on his shop to defend against exactly that sort of thing. Without being able to use class abilities as an unusual or unstoppable power, players are forced to get a little more creative.

It should not be left out that in an urban setting, unlike most others, the bard class can really shine! Even Monte had to admit that in any other setting, you just shouldn't bother playing the bard.

### Challenges of a City

Dungeons are easy to run. Cities are more difficult and require a lot of rethinking on the part of the GM. A lot of challenges are unique to an urban campaign.

A big difference between the standard campaign and the city is that the PCs will find ready access to healing and other helpful spells, especially to alleviate conditions. For example, in a standard dungeon crawl, being struck blind is a serious setback; but in the urban adventure, a character can duck out of battle,

hire a carriage to the nearby temple and pay a cleric to cast *remove blindness* on him. He's ready to jump back into battle within a half-hour. As a GM, this means you can be a little meaner to PCs and make encounters much harder.

Monte warns us not to assume that players in an urban campaign won't cast fireballs or control the weather – because if the can, they probably will! This can be a potential nightmare for the GM, but fortunately it's one that comes with a fairly easy solution.

During the course of an urban campaign, and with virtually no prompting from you as a GM, players become invested in a city that is their home and get to know the people there. Many times, players will create adventure hooks revolving around NPCs whom they have come to care about.

Furthermore, by living in a city and having a reputation there, PCs don't really want to see buildings destroyed, and they certainly don't want to be caught as the ones responsible for it happening! So when a *fireball*-happy character lets loose and crashes a flaming dirigible into the city, the PCs suddenly have to help put out fires and tend to the wounded – all while making a few well-placed bribes to cover their actions.

One might ask of the urban campaign, what is there to keep PCs, especially lower-level ones, from going for help? If there's a temple full of 20th-level paladins, why aren't the PCs always running to them when problems arise? There are several solutions to this very reasonable dilemma.

As a GM you must make it clear to the players that whatever it is they are doing is not the only thing going on in the city, nor is it the most important. Perhaps the PCs do approach the local knights' order for help with some rampaging undead. The order might very well have its hands full with a powerful necromancer in the temple district, and ask the PCs to help control the undead as a favor to the order. The order might pay the party, or provide them with items, potions or other resources. This involves the party in the affairs of the city – after all, if they do a good job with the undead they'll be in the good favor of the knights and might be able to pull a favor later on – but it also helps them invest themselves more.

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### When the PCs Won't Give Up

There is the occasional party that might decide that it is going to get help, and that's the end of it. They beg and plead with the knights, refusing the offers of alliance and support to handle the problem themselves, despite the knowledge that the order is already tied up with another conflict. What then?

The knightly order has a lot more experience with the evils of the city than the PCs. The knights know what's important and what can wait, and while they may want to help with the rampaging undead, they know that the necromancer is more important. They'll argue with the PCs about sending their forces, and such an argument could take long enough that even if the party does succeed in gaining help, the undead may have caused a significant amount of destruction. The players will probably realize that they could have stopped it if they had acted themselves. Additionally, they'll probably want to hide their faces in that part of town if the populace finds out that they chose not to help.

Let's say the order gives in and splits its forces to help the PCs. Perhaps they do manage to control the undead, but due to the weakening of the knights' forces, the necromancer overruns the other contingent of knights and is now wreaking havoc among the nobles and other innocent civilians. If it comes out that the PCs were the ones to weaken the knights' forces and bring about the necromancer's victory, the PCs will become highly unpopular in the city.

Additionally, every time you make new friends, you also gain a few new enemies. If your party does ally itself with the order of knights, it has probably made enemies of the drow settlement underground. The players might not see the effects of that alliance for many game sessions, but it becomes another resource for the GM.

Even if your PCs do insist on going for help, there's nothing to say that they can't find an entire game session's worth of adventure trying to find it. Perhaps they can't find an organization with the skills to handle this particular situation. Sometimes the PCs just find that if they want it done right, they have to do it themselves. And sometimes, especially with lower-level characters, the PCs will find that the city authorities just won't listen! "Who are you guys, anyway, and why should we believe you?"

### Other Things That Came Up

The seminar, in its rather informal nature, brought up a lot of questions, comments, observations and information to help an urban campaign. From things like PC jobs to evil parties to bookkeeping to living space, this section tackles all the bits and pieces.

A well-run urban campaign should have GM-mandated "downtime," in which characters can pursue their lives, hold down jobs, and generally relax and recover from the conflicts of the adventure. Sure, they can go to a cleric and get their hit points back, but realistically, you can only do so much before you're just exhausted. This serves a few purposes, one of which is to keep your characters from experiencing the bizarre "three weeks ago we were 1st-level nobodies and now we're the legends of the city" phenomenon.

In downtime, a character can hold down a job, be it within an outside organization or putting to use the Craft or Profession skills that get so little use in other campaign styles. It allows PCs to pursue larger-scale projects such as the building of homes or the creation of magical items. These activities not only help explore the characters, but also supply the GM with more adventure hooks. Remember that events are always happening in the city, not just around the PCs, and the character's home may lend a unique perspective on those events. Involvement in an organization provides plenty of allies and enemies for a character.

Can you run an evil party in an urban setting? Of course! PCs can just as easily be on the other side of the line between good and evil, and it can make for a very interesting game. In a city like Ptolus, an evil party's campaign could very quickly become very Mafia-like, given the various crime families and interrelationships between organizations.

It was repeatedly noted that reputation holds high importance in an urban campaign. The characters are going to be around for a while, and as they become more powerful and wealthy, their reputation is sure to grow. NPCs may decide to support the PCs, or they may decide that the party's latest find is something they want for themselves. It's important to remember that the NPCs are smart, too; they have access to spells and skills, but

not impossibly so. To be fair, if the party takes pains to cover their tracks, the NPCs might not know about the latest treasure.

An audience member asked what kinds of cities allow weaponry, and why? Monte noted first off that Ptolus is not a traditional city model – the idea started as a kind of "gold rush" town, in which the people came first and the civilization came much later (if it's come at all). Thus, it thrives on adventurers, and depriving them of their weapons and magic would be really bad, both for the economy, and also because of the evil that adventurers tend to stir up.

Using a more historically accurate medieval city can be difficult, since in D&D part of the fun is that you have all this cool weaponry and armor and magic, and taking it away from the players really takes away from the fun (although it might be interesting for *one* game session, Monte admits). A GM might use a compromise, where the law requires that all weapons and wands be peace tied in public areas, or the bearer must have a license to carry them.

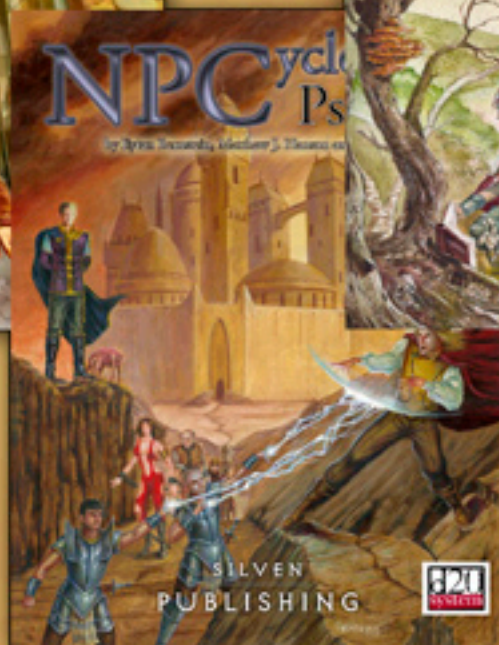
### Wrapping It Up

In closing of the discussion, Monte re-emphasized one point that kept coming up throughout: The key to successfully running an urban setting lies in the NPCs. To have an interesting, believable, unique setting, you must have interesting, believable and unique NPCs. This applies both ways, with good and evil personas. You can have recurring villains that the PCs passionately hate, and the PCs will find friends that they value as much as their own lives. It's elements like these that really make the urban campaign great.



Monte and Sue Cook of Malhavoc Press, presenting the Art of Urban Adventuring.





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# Women in Gaming

by Elizabeth Koprucki, with contributions from Elizabeth R.A. Liddell and Yuri-chan

Women are becoming more represented at Gen Con and in the gaming community. In 2000, a survey done by Wizards of the Coast found out that 19% of monthly players were female, and that number has grown in the past six years. Three years ago, there was one Gen Con seminar about female gamers, and it ended up being a rant-filled discussion. This year, a variety of seminars and panels explored different aspects of women in gaming, literature, and history.

## Are There Any Girls Out There?

### Getting Girls Into Gaming

The first question to answer is whether girls are interested in gaming, and if not, why not? This panel was hosted by Sheri Graner Ray and Teeuwynn Woodruff, both veteran game designers.

Some people wonder if girls play games. The answer is a resounding yes. They don't always play them in the direct head-to-head competitive style that most males prefer and most people recognize, but they do play them. It's not that girls aren't interested in RPGs, but that the culture associated with them – that of young white men – is hard to get into. And not just for women, either – it's also intimidating and difficult for older people and minorities to get involved. Also, hobbies tend to develop in adolescence, which is a time full of gender tensions. No teenage girl wants to be caught doing something associated primarily with geeky boys.

One thing to consider is the placement of gaming space. Are games held in stereotypically male spaces like computer labs and hobby shops? Women may feel too intimidated to step into these areas, although studies have shown that they are more likely to walk away silently than to say anything.

### Even Girls on the Inside...

Teeuwynn Woodruff is a designer for *Magic: The Gathering*. In this seminar she related a story of how she went into her FLGS, walked up to the counter and asked for a *Magic* booster pack. The guy at the counter raised his eyebrows, and then nodded understandingly. "A booster, eh? So your husband plays *Magic*?" It's a tiny demonstration of the general attitude women receive in the gaming industry.



Sheri Graner Ray, host and moderator of several Gen Con panels on women in gaming. She's co-founder and chair of Women In Games International (WIGI), and the industry's leading expert on gender issues in computer game design.

One solution is to reach out to gender-neutral or female-oriented organizations like the Girl Scouts or other clubs, and talk to the PTA and parents. Bring games to the women, and then bring the women into your game store. Also, once women do come in to game stores, make sure they're treated equally and not assumed to know nothing about games. Having female employees in game stores can help.

### The Wide World of More Information

There are countless message boards, forums, email lists, and other groups dedicated to women who play games. Two big resources are the Women In Games International website at <http://www.womeningamesinternational.org>, and the women's focus in the International Game Developers Association, at <http://www.igda.org/women/>, where you can also sign up for a mailing list.



It's important for the gaming industry's success that it try to include women. Women often have money and spend a lot of time shopping. In many families, women control the money, even for large purchases like computers, gaming consoles and the games themselves. But if they don't feel welcome in gaming, they'll take their money elsewhere.

## But What if the Player is Female?

### Gender-inclusive Game Design

Getting women interested in gaming is intertwined with the design of the games themselves. The panel that dealt with this was also hosted by Sheri Graner Ray.

Sheri first examined some common assumptions about designing games for girls. Some designers assume that all girls love Barbie®, and dolls like her. Also, they think they can “trick” girls into playing games by changing the packaging, a.k.a. “putting *Doom* in a pink box.” People also assume that girls hate violence, where in fact, girls tend to get bored with violence for violence's sake but are fine with it if it has a reason. Designers also assume that girls only like cute, fuzzy things. Many of these assumptions can be summarized as “All girls like the same stereotypically feminine things, and if we market a game based on them, every single girl will buy it.” As Sheri put it, assuming there's one kind of game for all girls is like assuming there's one kind of game for all Japanese people. The best solution is designing for a broader audience that specifically includes girls and women.

Another dangerous designer habit is to say “Girls don't like X,” where X may be violence, first-person shooters, sporty cars, a certain genre or even games as a whole. A view like this puts the blame on the girls for not enjoying something – it's something wrong with the girls, not the game – rather than on the designer for not creating a game that appeals to girls. It lets the game companies off the hook for not attracting the female gamer audience.

Men and women tend to approach games differently, and there are several aspects to this worth considering when designing a game. First of all, men and women tend to learn games differently. Men usually want to be dropped right into the middle of the action and learn their way around by exploring. Women prefer to learn how something works first and be first introduced to the game in a step-by-step tutorial.

Another obvious but important consideration is character appearance. Both male and female characters in games are generally designed with male players in mind. Often, the only female characters' appearance options include exaggerated signs of sexual receptivity: the “bedroom eyes,” full red lips, heavy breathing (usually shown as a slightly open mouth), and erect nipples. Now imagine for a moment that all the male characters looked like they walked out of a Calvin Klein ad. Most men find it very uncomfortable – exactly the reaction most women have when faced with most game avatars.

Gender is also related to the preferred means of conflict resolution. Men tend to prefer head-to-head competition

## On Learning Games...

Sheri Graner Ray shows how vast the difference between male and female learning styles can be. If you give a boy and a girl each an arcade token and send them in, the boy runs up to the first game he sees, throws in his token and starts pushing buttons. The girl hangs behind, watching him. She may move down the line of games, watching the intro loop, trying to learn how any of the games work before she spends her token. But since those intro loops are designed mostly to grab attention, not teach the game, the girl may eventually just give up and leave.

Carry this over in to RPGs. How many of the female readers of this 'zine spent their first RPG session just watching, not joining in the game until a later session? Does anyone watch the rest of her group play a session or two of a new game before jumping in? Chances are, the answer is “yes.”

where there is a definite winner and loser. Women tend to prefer indirect competition, trying to do a given task better than another person or group of people. Women also prefer negotiation and compromise, as well as emotional resolution both in and out of games.

Finally, men tend to prefer punishment for error in a game as an irretrievable loss of progress. You die, and you go back and start over empty-handed. Women prefer progress to be halted with nothing lost. If you can't get past an obstacle, you run around until you can get past it, losing nothing but having your progress through the game stopped until you figure it out. Many of the puzzles in *Legend of Zelda* games follow this more feminine model. Interestingly enough, a more forgiving punishment system actually encourages play for both genders.

## So how to begin designing inclusively?

Keep the above in mind, and at every turn in the process ask, “But what if the player is female?”

### Women in the Industry

This was another panel moderated by Sheri Graner Ray and featuring Teeuwynn Woodruff, as well as Laura Hickman, Gwendolyn Kestrel, Lisa Steenson, and Sherry Yeary, all of whom are successful in the game industry. It was closely connected to issues of game design and female involvement in games. After all, one of the best ways to make sure a game

## How is an Avatar Different from an Ad?

A common question that comes up when discussing female avatars in games is, “What's the difference between the appearances of game avatars and the models in women's magazines like *Cosmopolitan*?” The answer is simple. If you read *Cosmo* and look at the ads of hyper-sexualized models, you can choose to go out and buy the products to attain that appearance – but you don't have to. In a game where the only female avatars are hyper-sexualized, that decision has been made for you, and you don't have a choice.

appeals to a broad and diverse group of people is to have a broad and diverse workforce in all parts of the company. Unfortunately, there's still a glass ceiling in the gaming industry, just like in many others. Many people aren't aware of it. The game industry began as a young white male culture, and that's a hard thing to change once entrenched.

The panelists recommended that women who wanted to get involved in the industry pursue it intensely and seek out opportunities. Also, networking at events like Gen Con is important. Sometimes jobs come because of tangential contacts.

### **Chainmail Bikinis and Iron Jockstraps: Gender in Gaming**

This discussion's panel featured Steve Kenson, Lucien Soulban, Michelle Nephew, and Bill Korsak. One of the first questions was "Have we moved past gender exploitation in games?" The answer seemed to be that at the very least, many games are getting better. Unfortunately, some people haven't been happy with this. *Blue Rose*, a popular game with a setting that's very inclusive of cultures, genders, and sexualities, caused some people to feel very threatened. The game's designers actually got hate mail about it.

The panelists agreed that game manufacturers have a responsibility for gender representation. They certainly have capitalistic responsibility to their shareholders and employees. Individual GMs also have a lot of responsibility for how gender is presented in their games.

Cross-gendered characters tend to point out gender issues. When men choose to play female characters, they swing in one of two directions. One is to give so much attention to the sexuality of the character that it can actually interfere with gameplay. The other is a frigid, asexual concept that only qualifies as female in that she has long hair. But when women play male characters, there are occasionally mirrors of the above, but more often a moderate approach more interested in exploring the mindset rather than the sexuality.

### **Chicks Kick Butt**

This panel was part of the many reading and writing seminars at Gen Con. Kerrie Hughes and Elizabeth Vaughn were the panelists. They discussed novels featuring strong female protagonists, particularly paranormal romances, which are a hot category right now. First-person stories are also popular, which led to a discussion after the panel of how to show exposition in that point of view.

Someone brought up that there still aren't that many examples of equal partnerships in books. A truly equal dynamic partnership would make a book interesting, as there would be a give and take.

The panelists also mentioned making sure that the book heroines "do sensible things" and avoid the "too-stupid-to-live phenomenon."

### **Women as Warriors**

These seminars were part of the Gen Con Symposium. The four-part series was hosted by Major David Wesely, who was

originally asked to give a discussion on the subject last year after convention planners heard him talking about his experiences during the integration of women in the army.

He started with prehistoric times in his exploration of why women historically were less likely to fight or not allowed to at all. In every historical period, it seemed like there were exceptions – women who would disguise themselves as men and join the military. Sometimes they were found out and kicked out, sometimes they were found out and allowed to stay, and sometimes no one ever found out. (An extreme example of the last case was Jenny Rodgers, who survived the Civil War and was only discovered to be a woman when she was hit by a truck in 1911.)

In the seminar about the Middle Ages, he discussed a possibility for women who wanted to fight – mercenary companies. These tended to be more irregular and had a rougher reputation than the official armies, but some ended up being respected. A lucky woman could earn respect and a decent career in some of them.

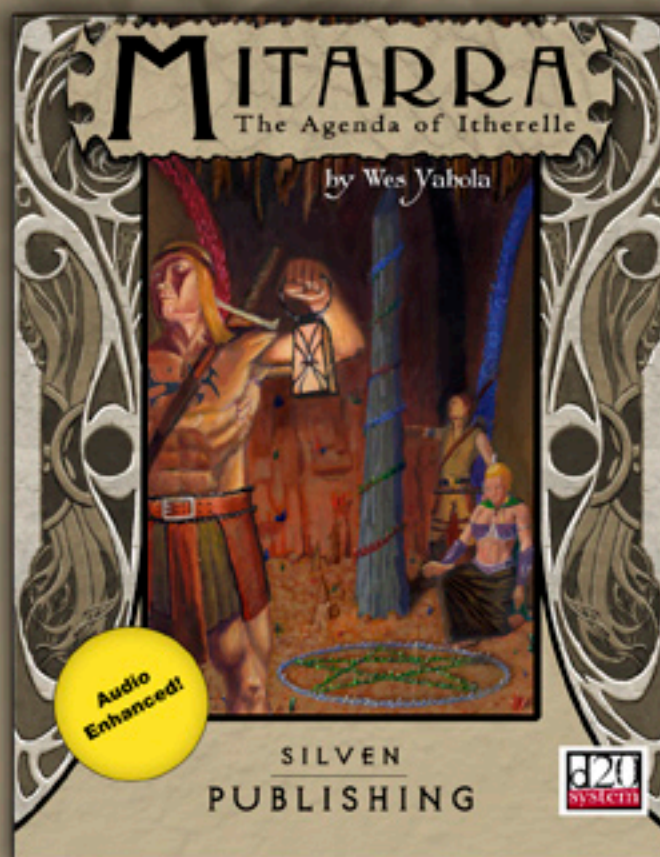
Major Wesely also talked about women who were involved in war, but technically not combatants – nurses and "legal laundresses" (who were also government-sanctioned prostitutes attached to American units). The latter eventually caused a scandal that affected the further integration of women into the armed forces. As in today's military, the "non-combat" personnel often saw nearly as much action as those assigned to battle.

He ended the series of talks with some of his own anecdotes about members of the Women's Army Corps. They were carefully separated from the men, but over and over proved that they were not the delicate naïve girls the army treated them as. At one point, four of them managed to disarm and tie up a male private who attempted to infiltrate their (fenced-off) barracks.

### **A Cinematic Perspective: The Gamers 2**

The movie *The Gamers 2: Dorkness Rising* illustrates some of the stereotypes and realities of being a girl gamer in a humorous way. At the beginning of the movie, Lodge's gaming group is looking for some new members. One of the players invites his friend Joanne. The group is suspicious of having a girl among them, especially because she's never gamed before. When she goes into the game store, all the men come out and stare at her in utter shock to see a girl in their territory. She makes a character, but the guys are convinced that she couldn't possibly do it right and try to remake it for her (they want the character to wear a chainmail bikini, of course). Her fresh approach ends up inspiring the other members of the group to make different characters from what they usually play, including (gasp) another woman. And hilarity ensues... including a scene showing the stereotypes of men's and women's problem solving in games – Joanne wants to talk her way out of a conflict and the male characters just want to fight.





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# PODCASTING AND ONLINE GAMING AUDIO

by Michael J. Thompson

A panel of members of several podcasts on the GOBLIN network assembled during Gen Con to discuss podcasting and gaming. The room was almost overflowing with people who were currently podcasting or were considering it. The panel fielded questions on a variety of topics.

Recording equipment required to create podcasts varies and runs from very cheap to very expensive, depending on tastes and needs. Most panelists recommended that beginners look for the cheapest and most available in your area. Paul Tevis of “Have Games, Will Travel” started with a headset and an iRiver MP3 player, and created 10 shows before deciding whether he was interested in committing more time and money into the ongoing venture. Obviously, in addition to recording devices, you’ll need a relatively new computer with sound-editing software.

Many software options are available. The panel mentioned a number of products, including Audacity, MixCraft, Skype, Audition and DJ Mixing Studio. For entry-level podcasters, the free program Audacity is a great product. For podcasters wishing to work together but who are separated geographically, Skype is a must-have; it can be downloaded for free and is easy to use, although it can be a resource hog.

Editing a final product from your recordings will be the most time-consuming aspect of any podcast. Time varies based on content, the number of speakers, and length. A good rule of thumb is to plan on spending two hours in editing for every one hour of recorded content.

Several audience members asked whether panel members had received any formal voice training. Some panel members were actors or theater majors, while others are or were active in college radio. The panel pointed out that their experiences are not necessarily the norm for podcasting, however. The important thing is that you are comfortable speaking about your topics (either alone or with others) and can project your voice clearly enough to be understood.

Audience members were also interested in the best podcast format: the right number of participants, show content, show length and so forth. The answers ranged widely, as there is no easy answer for all circumstances.

Some on the panel chose to create podcasts with two or more hosts, as it allows for an exchange of thoughts and ideas, and prevents boredom from listening to “one voice droning on and on.” However, other panel members such as Paul Tevis have

been running podcasts as a solo act for some time and have no problems with the format. The key to any good podcast is timing. Know how long any subject (or the whole of a podcast) can keep the interest of the audience, and any number of hosts can be used. Usually, timing issues take awhile to understand, but audience feedback can help.

The panel also recommended knowing what topics to cover before you start recording. Nothing will lose an audience faster than a show that rambles or jumps quickly from topic to topic with no rhyme or reason. Determine what you want to talk about, calculate how long to cover the topic in detail without rambling, and stick to that format.

Everyone recommended that new podcasters create a series or “miniseries” of episodes instead of a single show when starting out. Podcasting can be very rewarding, but is also quite time-consuming and at times maddening. Working on a short series of episodes gives newcomers the opportunity to decide if podcasting is really something they want to dedicate themselves to doing.

Other questions covered the popularity of gaming podcasts and marketing. Some panel members suggested we are quickly reaching the saturation level in the number of gaming podcasts available. Many different podcasts are already available to today’s gamer, covering everything from the state of the industry, game reviews, genre discussions, how-to workshops, and even play-by-plays of gaming sessions. However, the key to success is finding a topic you are interested in and earnest about and focusing on it. Narrow focus may seem shortsighted, but with so many different niche podcasts available, you can spotlight your show’s individuality and strength by maintaining specific content.

Even with concerns about market saturation, subscriptions to podcasts are on the rise. Paul Tevis’ “Have Games, Will Travel” currently has about 1,000 subscribers, and the number of subscriptions is increasing by about 50 listeners each week. While creating podcasts can be a pleasure, they can also be a great way to market yourself to the public.

With all of the kinds of gaming podcasts available, one might feel overwhelmed by the choices. The panel suggests using the GOBLIN website, [www.gbncom.com](http://www.gbncom.com), which sorts and categorizes many podcasts. A number of other options are available, including the listing at iTunes. More can be found doing Google searches. Most podcasters also maintain a website for their show, where you can subscribe.

Overall, one can create an entertaining and informative podcast with a little initial investment and a healthy dose of time.



# Getting Personal with Your PC

## The Power of the Backstory

by Yuri-chan

Jason O'Brien and Levi McCulloch of Team Iuz conducted this Gen Con seminar on describing good background stories for your characters. A full room awaited the pair as they offered handouts containing back stories and even rules to follow when creating interesting histories.

A character's back story is always important. But players sometimes go to extremes in creating one. The "novel" back story, for example, is a detailed account with multiple pages. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the "uninformative background," which offers no motive for the character. The GM should watch out for both types. The novel background tends to cover all points of the character's life, leaving no mystery for the GM to exploit. The uninformative background is the opposite, providing little detail for the GM to work with. It also can reveal a player who is not really interested in his character.

If a character's back story doesn't work or doesn't fit in with the other characters, don't be afraid to rein in the player. Go through the background and point out the good and the bad elements. If the player insists on keeping something that doesn't fit, either rule against the player, or let him know that while the character might think something happened, he was probably hallucinating during and everyone else remembers it differently.

For more information about Jason and Levi, check out their website at [www.teamiuz.com](http://www.teamiuz.com).

### Rules for writing a back story

Jason and Levi offered these simple rules to writing a good back story:

1. Keep it simple.
2. Try to stay away from cliché back stories such as orphans, noble birthright, elves, etc.
3. Keep the mystery. You don't need to know every little detail about your character.
4. The more problems, the better.
5. If you're going to use anything nonstandard, always ask your GM before putting a lot of time into it.

Some things a GM can watch for as players create their back stories:

1. Find commonality between your players' back stories
2. Exploit opposites in characters
3. Turn the story around on the characters
4. Use back stories as your guide. Tell the story that the players want.
5. Don't be afraid to use 'creative license' on what you are given.

# Gaming in the Library

by Elizabeth Koprucki

I expected the Gaming in the Library seminar to be mostly about having roleplaying books in library collections. That was mentioned, but there was much more to it. About ten people attended this seminar, and all of them seemed very interested in the subject. Most of them were both gamers and librarians, or studying library science.

The presenter, Jami Schwartzwalder, focused mostly on how to get people to come into libraries and play games – computer games, RPGs, CCGs, board games, and anything else people might be interested in. Events like these would help the library be even more of a community resource, and get younger people into the library. But gaming events shouldn't just focus on teens. After all, the average age of gamers is 33.

Libraries are ideal spaces for gaming because they tend to have lots of space and lots of tables. A lot of resources are available easily, such as books on history or mythology, along with librarians to help players find them. There are even books like *Spiderwick's Field Guide*, which is similar to the D&D *Monster Manual*. Some branches have video games and systems available for checkout.

How do you go about getting gaming events and books into libraries? Jami Schwartzwalder had some practical suggestions.

First of all, let libraries know there's a demand for games and gaming events. RPG books, for example, aren't necessarily reviewed in the publications librarians look at, so they might not be aware of them. Take advantage of web comment forms and book request forms. Bring board and card games to the library to get things started.

Once librarians know the demand is there, they need to collect the materials. Community grants from companies like Target can help with budgeting. Game companies themselves sometimes donate books, too. For example, Wizards of the Coast will donate *Dungeons and Dragons* core books and campaign settings to libraries who want to host community games.

There may be some resistance to gaming in libraries. First of all, many people don't realize that games are educational – especially the ones not marketed that way.

Some people might find the idea of gaming in libraries strange – it goes against the image of the “quiet, please” building filled with dusty books. But libraries have already pushed that envelope with some of their young adult programs.

Hosting games in libraries could also help the gender divide among gamers. A majority of librarians are female (even now), and this could encourage girls to start gaming.



# Meet the Silven Trumpeter Press Team!

**Elizabeth R.A. Liddell – Editor-in-Chief & Press Team Co-coordinator**

Elizabeth R.A. Liddell only answers to the name Lyz and often initials things “Z.” She loves opening packages that come in the mail and thought that the *Player’s Guide to Prolus* was a mail bomb when it showed up on her porch, unannounced, from an address she didn’t recognize. She has been attending Gen Con since its last year in Milwaukee, and loves it more every year. While she will readily admit that running a press team this big has caused her to become a zombie and put random objects on her head, she’s also already making plans to do it again next year!



**Eytan Bernstein – Writer & Press Team Co-coordinator**

Eytan Bernstein is a game designer and horticulturist from Long Island, New York. While designing games, he has been teaching English (ESL) and history in several countries, including the US, Korea, Canada, Atlantis, and Poland. Eytan is also an avid musician, film buff, animal enthusiast, and anti-Luddite. Every year, he goes to Gen Con to bring the latest exclusives to Silven readers from within the trenches. Eytan thinks that it’s important for readers to realize the great sacrifice that he makes each year at Gen Con to find these exclusive insights into the volatile and sometimes dangerous world of pen and paper role-playing games. He implores you to remember that Gen Con seminars are a brutal and bloody experience, requiring participants to brave harsh atmospheric conditions and subsist on ascarids, earthworms, and other nematodes. In fact, Gen Con is an awful lot like *Fear Factor*, except that rather than winning \$50,000, participants are subjected to over 72 hours of grueling, non-stop game-playing. When reading these articles, you must realize how much of his own blood, sweat, and tears have been shed to make these articles possible.



**Nash Devita – Writer & Press Team Reviews Coordinator**

Nash Devita is the Head of Reviews for the *Silven Trumpeter*, and as such, handles somewhere between two and two billion products for review each issue. At Gen Con, Nash is almost always in the Exhibitors’ Hall, but good luck finding him. He’s usually tucked away talking to a small publisher about a new indie game, as those are his favorites. He wins awards not only for spending the most time in the Exhibitors’ Hall, but also for conducting the most interviews and for bringing home the most new games!



### Elizabeth “Echan” Koprucki – Writer

Elizabeth “E-chan” Koprucki loves most things creative and shiny, including roleplaying, writing, reading, jewelry, dice, caffeine, and art of various sorts. Given the chance, she does her best to combine these. She also likes cheesecake, chocolate, eggs, and ferrets, some of which should not be combined. Her most recent writing for Silven has been done under the watchful yet subtle gaze of Secret Agent Cthulhu, who sits (in plush form) on her computer monitor.



### Joel “Agent X” Oberdieck – Writer

Joel “Agent X” Oberdieck didn’t know he was coming to Gen Con until the Sunday before the convention. When a space opened unexpectedly in the Silven Press Team, leaving events to be covered and only the letter “X” in the schedule, Joel was called up and informed that he would, in fact, be going to Gen Con in four days. He professes to be a rather geeky sort, spending the majority of his free time developing a World War II war game so large it won’t fit on anyone’s table. Creatively, he calls this monstrosity the “Super Big-Ass Map,” or “SBAM” for short.



### Jeff Thetford – Writer

Jeff’s life changed in 1979 when his parents gave him the *Dungeons and Dragons* 1st edition boxed set for Christmas. Little did they know that 28 years later he would still be fighting dragons and evil barons, and consorting with the most depraved creatures of any universe: halflings. Now, not only does he still play RPGs, but he writes fantasy and science fiction short stories and novels born out of a brain that is not only lacking in sunlight and steeped in hops, but rife with images so fantastic and unbound by any normal human psyche that it would drive most men mad to even glimpse them.



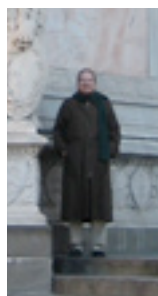
### Michael Thompson – Writer

Michael Thompson is secretly the exiled warlord of a spacefaring empire. While he plans his return to the stars, he writes and edits RPG books for Silven Publishing, including the *Races of Twilight* series. He has gained an uncanny knowledge of computers and worthless sci-fi and fantasy trivia, and hopes that one day the voices in his head will just shut up and let him get some sleep. Mr. Thompson is currently convalescing in North Attleboro, Massachusetts. He can be contacted at [desslok@gmail.com](mailto:desslok@gmail.com).



### Landon J. Winkler – Writer

Dante Alighieri was a thirteenth-century poet known for his work *The Divine Comedy* and for establishing the standards of the Italian language. The small guy standing next to him is Landon J. Winkler, a weird guy who likes to play collectible card games. During Gen Con, he was generally exiled to the CCG





tournament hall, where he ate lots of nachos and watched the last round of every tournament ever. His favorite things about Gen Con are Video Games Live, the broken escalators, and P.F. Chang's China Bistro.

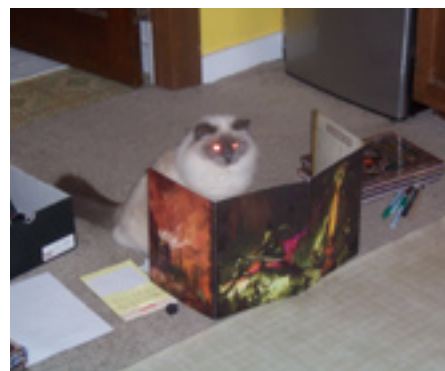
#### **Jeff Harkness – Editor**

Jeff Harkness, who admits to being scared of the “scrubbing bubbles” as a child, moonlights at his “real job” as a newspaper’s assistant editor. He’s been playing D&D for nearly three decades and still has character sheets older than his two daughters to prove it. When he’s not writing for White Wolf or Necromancer Games, Jeff gets his kicks editing other people’s conversations, road signs, bar coasters, recipe labels or whatever else is written in a language he can read. Jeff is brought to you by the letter J and the number 4.



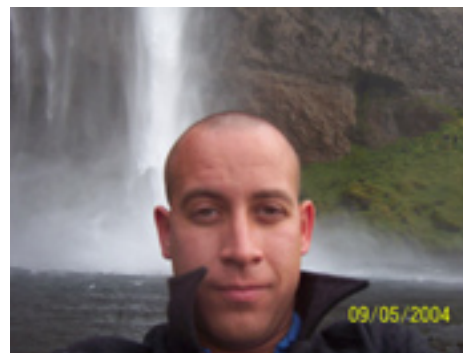
#### **Mike Ring – Editor**

Mike Ring is a freelance d20 designer and editor who came very close to DMing the whole Age of Worms campaign in three months. But Perchie took over as DM, and her wrath was too terrible for even the toughest epic party. When not summoning trolls to the battlemat, Perchie sprawls out on the D&D Miniatures maps instead. At least she can't do too much damage to Mike's digital Magic Online cards.



#### **James Quigley – Editor**

James Quigley has been playing Dungeons and Dragons since he was 8 years old, back in 1984. He started with the red box and moved on to each of the other versions throughout the years. An avid gamer, he juggles with RPGs, CRPGs, writing, and beer in his leisure time. He is currently stationed in Germany, and is a proud member of the armed forces. He has a wife, and a four-month old baby girl who is his joy in life.



#### **Don Steiner – Proofreader**

A mad scientist trapped in the body of a slacker, Don is a man for whom “happiness” is spelled “zombies.” While not organizing data for his Unified Revenant Classification Project, he maintains a collection of words he finds amusing. His current favorite is “stevedore.” In addition to his contributions in the fields of science and literature, Don has achieved a modicum of fame as the man who introduced the concept of “hang time” to bowling.



## Keith Parkinson Remembered

by Elizabeth Koprucki

Keith Parkinson died of leukemia on October 26, 2005, a few days after his 47th birthday. He was a highly regarded fantasy and science fiction artist and illustrator. He worked at TSR for five years, illustrating for *Dragonlance* and *Forgotten Realms* books and *Dragon* magazine. He left in the early '90s and went on to do freelance work, creating covers for books by Terry Brooks, Terry Goodkind, Orson Scott Card, C.J. Cherryh, David Eddings, and many others, as well as for *Magic: The Gathering* and the *Rifts* RPG. In 1995 he developed the *Guardians* CCG. In 2000, he began working more on the electronic end of game design and created the art for *Everquest* and its expansions. In 2002, he became art director of Sigil Games. Throughout his career, he also produced work for himself, testing his limits and expressing his unique vision.

His memorial at Gen Con Indy was well attended. Many of the guests were artists, creating a feeling of community and camaraderie. As people told emotional stories of him, it became clear that this was the sort of atmosphere he himself fostered. Keith's good friend and fellow artist, Donato Giancola, hosted the memorial. He, along with Jeff Easley, Ben Thompson, Jeff A. Menges, Bill O'Connor, Diesel, and Larry Elmore shared their memories of Keith and talked about their favorite paintings of his.

One painting kept coming up over and over: Keith's cover for *Chernevog*, a novel by C.J. Cherryh based on Russian folklore. It shows a young man, presumably dead, lying on a stone slab in a somber grey forest, with yellow leaves floating down. This piece was selected as Keith's gravestone. As Ben Thompson pointed out, everything in the painting points toward the man's heart, making it an appropriate choice.

One of the common threads in the speakers' stories was how much of an inspiration Keith was for their own work. At least one of them started painting after seeing Keith's work, and several of them talked about how much help he was when they were getting started. Keith understood how important a self-supporting community is for fantasy and science fiction art, and he did everything he could to help it, never claiming special status. The speakers also talked about how quickly he grew as an artist, from the young man hired for his potential, to the art director at the top of his craft who was still willing to learn and improve.

They also talked about the depth of the world creation in Keith's paintings. The landscapes themselves, as well as the people and creatures, belonged to a different world. He also had a sense for characters, whether humans or "monsters." Another favorite painting was "What Do You Mean We're Lost?" The painting shows draconians frantically arguing in the snow. In the furthest part of the background horses and riders can be seen. This painting, as well as many others, demonstrated Keith's gift for visual narrative.

There was a Keith Parkinson tribute area in Artists' Alley this year. Several of the speakers suggested naming one of Gen Con's

art awards after him. Donato himself also created a unique tribute.

Keith designed the iconic characters for Sigil Games' forthcoming MMORPG *Vanguard*, but became too sick to do the box art. He asked Donato to do it for him. Donato painted the left side of the panel (the front of the box) in Keith's style, which slowly transitioned to Donato's style toward the right side of the painting. He also added Keith into the painting as a character.

## What the Gamers Have to Say

by Elizabeth R.A. Liddell

One of the last sessions at Gen Con is the feedback seminar, a very informal gathering with Peter Adkison and five other non-volunteer Gen Con Indy staff members. The get-together offers an opportunity for gamers to bring their observations, suggestions and complaints right to the top of the chain of command.

While a few complaints went unresolved, most attendees brought up very thoughtful suggestions for helping the convention run more smoothly. People also were eager to praise the staff for things they liked. Most notable about this session, however, was the number of suggestions that were already being investigated and implemented.

In response to frustration over the first day of preregistration, when users may spend upward of six hours registering for a badge and events, Peter Adkison was quick to sympathize. He is considering a \$100,000 upgrade to the registration servers to one day help with that problem. If that's not customer care, nothing is!

Attendees mentioned the noise and distraction in the RPG rooms, where upward of eight games can be running at once. The staff proudly pointed to this year's testing of curtained rooms and the cubicle-like "RPG Room of the Future," and made it clear that some of the new rooms will become available at next year's Gen Con in Indianapolis.

When questioned about a better way to advertise games with openings, the staff detailed several solutions, up to and including airport-style terminal banks and televisions at each headquarter station.

The staff is also considering a "first-timers' guide" to help those new to Gen Con figure out how to best approach the 5,000-plus events and endless activities during the Best Four Days in Gaming. Ideas under consideration are a series of articles on the Gen Con website, a separate section in the event program, and even physical packages to purchase at the convention that will include water bottles and snacks!

Given this level of thinking ahead and planning in line with the Gen Con attendees, it's clear that Gen Con is only going to get better in the years to come!



## Activities for the Better Half Belly dancing, cooking and yoga at Gen Con? You bet!

by Elizabeth Koprucki

This year, a new category of events appeared at GenCon – the Activities for the Better Half. These workshops were designed so that nongamers who came with a gamer (such as spouses, significant others, parents and children of gamers) would have something to do. The events included yoga, belly dancing, karate, crafts and food-related workshops. Many seemed designed to appeal to women, who were the majority of participants.

The activities seemed to be well-received. The most popular I attended was the belly-dancing class. Around 40 or 50 people crammed into the room. The wine-tasting session also seemed to be popular when I peeked in the door. To get a closer look, I visited the belly-dancing workshop, karate class and a “cooking for gamers” recipe sharing.

The belly-dancing and karate classes seemed to be aimed at beginners, and included suggestions on how to further pursue the discipline and how to find teachers. The karate class emphasized safety and acting defensively, instead of looking for a fight. Participants in both workshops were from a broad range of ages. After the belly-dancing workshop, I talked to Gina, a self-proclaimed “gaming widow-ish.” She and her boyfriend love to game – just different kinds of games. They’ve been coming to Gen Con since it was first held in Indianapolis. The first year, they did everything together; now, they mostly attend separate activities.

I met Jen after the karate class. She was on her own, her second time at the convention, and her first time being there for all four days. She was glad to see the SPA activities, and figured that she didn’t have to game all the time. Next year, she plans to take karate again, as well as belly dancing. She hopes to see more creative activities such as pottery, drawing and writing seminars. She would also like to see other kinds of dance offered.

After the recipe-sharing session, I talked to Melissa and Kelly. Melissa is a gamer herself, married to a gamer husband. This was her first SPA event, but she had scheduled two others. She attended the presentation because her husband’s friends often come over to game and eat. She said they were “shocked” when she first brought out her dice.

Kelly wasn’t a gamer – at least “not yet,” she said – but her boyfriend bought a convention pass for her. Melissa and Kelly thought the list of events sounded like something men hoped women would do – get flexible, dance, cook and make things for them. Melissa said she wanted to see more activities targeted at men to break the stereotypes of the male gamer and the female “gamer widow.”

A booth set up throughout the convention accepted feedback on SPA activities. A signup sheet was also offered for presenters and events for next year. Look for this event category to grow in the future!

## Whose Line is it Anyway?

by Yuri-chan

Using the popular British and American television show “Whose Line is it Anyway?” as a guide, Kim Humphreys and his daughter Kimberly have been bringing game show and comic improv excitement to Gen Con for about eight years now. But instead of four contestants, as the TV show allows, Kim chooses audience members randomly so everyone has a chance.

The workshop, as Gen Con calls it now, was half full when the show began, and some people looked as if they were just dying to share what they thought would be funny. Kim started out by asking everyone to fill out a list of favorite party quirks. At first, I didn’t understand why he needed these, but I soon would. These quirks soon found their way onto the stage for skits.

For the first “expression exercise,” six people were chosen to present the World’s Worst. Subcategories included Batman villains, children’s book titles and opening lines for novels. Some people thought of many answers, while others couldn’t think of any. But everyone was laughing and having a great time.

Next, Kim added his own twist to the show. He chose 13 people from the audience to present the “13 Days before Gen Con” – his version of “The Twelve Days of Christmas.” This was a riot because he made audience members sing – even if they couldn’t.

After everyone was again done laughing, he tasked the audience with picking superhero names and world crises. This got a little weird when he called for six volunteers and gave one person in the group a superhero name. He then informed that person of an impending world crisis and had him call in his five superhero friends (the other audience members) to help solve the problem. To top it off, performers had to act out their names; if he was Vibrating Man, he had to shake himself across the stage. Contestants were out of breath when they were done, due to so much laughing.

Kim had many more wonderful ideas, but I won’t give them all away. He even did many of the TV show’s skits. This was great fun for the whole family to watch as audience members tried to think on their feet. If you attend and want to get up on stage, go right ahead.

# True Dungeon

The Hottest Event at Gen Con Indy

by Elizabeth R.A. Liddell

On the opening day of Gen Con Indy's preregistration, there is one event that is so popular that tickets are made available on the website in waves in order to keep from crashing the website. Even with one wave of tickets at noon, one at three, and one at six, every available ticket is sold within an hour of the start time – and that is only because the Gen Con servers have trouble handling the press of traffic on that first day. We're talking about the True Dungeon, an event that in only three years has become one of Gen Con's highlights.

## What *is* the True Dungeon?

The True Dungeon is an immersive, live-action roleplaying experience based upon traditional *Dungeons & Dragons*. Players start in the True Dungeon Fantasy Tavern, where they can buy drinks, game, hang out, and prepare for their excursion into the Dungeon. In groups of seven, players are brought through a series of elaborately created dungeon rooms and halls. In each room they solve puzzles and riddles, "fight" monsters, and – of course – gather treasure and loot!

Each room in the dungeon has one or more "obstacles" to overcome. It might be a puzzle to find which one egg out of 24 weighs slightly more than the others, while only being able to use the provided scale three times. It might be a monster with a gaze that turns party members to stone. Your party might be called upon to remember features about several rooms past to solve the puzzle in the current room. Some puzzles are harder than others, and some are aimed more at certain classes than others. The classes playable in the True Dungeon are your standard D&D base classes, with a few omitted to keep the group manageable. The druid and monk were new classes offered for the first time this year, and the sorcerer is the only class still left out.

Each class has many of the same class abilities, though most are transformed from being resolved by a die roll into being resolved by some kind of challenge. For example, the strength of a cleric's spell depends on the player's ability to identify a designated prayer bead out of a set; likewise, the wizard must identify a specified plane on a visual diagram to achieve his spell's full potential. The rogue literally picks traps in a vaguely *Operation-*esque manner, and the bard is often found actually singing the praises of his party.

Combat is altered from the traditional D&D combat system. Instead of rolling dice, the players are given casters (called sliders) into which a weapon token is placed. These casters are then slid across a table from one end; on the other end is an image of the foe with target ranges on it. The space in which the slider stops is the equivalent of your attack roll, and you can add any bonuses from the weapon, special effects and the like – just as in regular D&D.

Where does one get that weapon token? Well, when you check in for your event, you are given a stamp on one arm and a bag of wooden tokens. You can also purchase additional tokens in the Tavern, and it's perfectly allowable and common to trade tokens among party members to optimize your character. Tokens represent everything from weapons and armor to gold pieces to scrolls and rare item components. Veterans of the Dungeon are known to have binders with massive collections of tokens, much as a CCG player will have libraries of cards.

## Jeff Martin on the Tokens

Jeff Martin, creator of the True Dungeon, mentioned that he never really meant for the tokens to become the prized, collectible items that they have become. Originally they were just a neat way to represent one's armor, weapons and treasure in the dungeon. He admits to being terrible at managing collectible products and leaves the organization of them to one of the volunteers. He estimates that there are probably about 100,000 tokens currently in circulation.



The team rogue picking a trap as time runs out! Photo Chris Johnson



## The History of the True Dungeon

Jeff Martin is the creator of the True Dungeon, and was kind enough to endure not only one, but two interviews with Silven. Here, he talks about the beginning of his project.

**Silven:** How did you come up with the idea for True Dungeon?

**Jeff:** It is something that really evolved over several years. For 10 years I have been hosting a little gaming summit for friends, and the highlight every year is the cool D&D team tourney that features real life props. When Gen Con moved to Indy in 2003 Peter found that he had a lot more room, so we was telling Stefan about how we wanted to have a Big Event at the new location. Peter said he was thinking about a walk-thru maze or something. Well...a bell went off in Stefan's head, and he said, "Hey...I know this crazy guy that builds props and life-size rooms for his D&D events. Maybe he could do it?"

A few emails later and Peter and I were introduced. It was January and so I sent him an invitation to my gaming summit (JefCON) that takes place in March. Invitations that year consisted of these cool looking old scroll tubes that had one end booby-trapped with a firecracker. Well, Peter opened it at Gen Con HQ -- picking the wrong end (not the one the griffin was facing) and he got quite a startle.

Needless to say, Peter was hooked at that point. He might be a bigger geek than me! Anyway, he came to JefCON, saw my props and sets, and then we had a little talk over pancakes at the Bob Evans. I told him that I had always dreamed of making a life-size walk-thru dungeon that would let the players "feel" the experience as much as possible.

That is how I came up with the whole "true" concept. I thought it would be really neat to feel your pulse pound as you tried to disarm a trap, or hit a monster at a crucial time, or solve a puzzle as time ran out. I told him I wanted to do something that paid homage to a game I dearly love, but that was original and interesting on its own. He totally trusted me, gave me a big pile of money, and said have fun...you have 4 months. Go!

## Some of Jeff Martin's Props

One of the first props Jeff came up with for JefCON was a staff of healing. He designed the object with a secret compartment, in which was hidden a bit of parchment with the command word written upon it. Another real prop was a rabbit fur with a map on the back, which the players had to use to solve puzzles.

At the JefCON that Peter Adkison attended, Jeff rented an entire hotel room and built within it a full dungeon room, complete with a secret door and secret chamber for the final challenge. He says that even having pre-designed the entire thing, he was up pretty much all night putting it together. This was the first real "true" dungeon experience, where the players got to really immerse themselves, and it encouraged Peter Adkison to jump on the idea for Gen Con.

So, it was a total rush job to get the event ready in four months. I think I went with the design principle of "doing the geekiest thing possible" and hammered out the whole concept and rules over a weekend. It was really all just a blur -- those four months as we had to build a huge event from scratch. Somewhere in there I talked about a dozen friends into helping me.

**Silven:** What was the overall creative process you used to develop it?

**Jeff:** This is going to sound very weird, but I do my best work, by far, by getting into a car and driving somewhere with a gaming buddy. That weekend the game was designed I grabbed my good friend Aaron Boaz, a 64 oz. Dr. Pepper, some beef jerky, a couple packs of peanut butter crackers and my pipe, and we drove around rural southern Illinois like a couple of goofballs. And we talked. And we brainstormed. And we produced some great ideas for True Dungeon.

I don't know how my brain is affected by driving and talking, but I am certain that I get my best creative ideas this way. Maybe someday I will start "Jeff's Redneck Think Tank" -- which will consist of me and 3 guys driving around the Shawnee Hills of southern Illinois in my F-150 and talking.

If you're really worked up about that puzzle that you just couldn't figure out, or you were just dying to know what that weird symbol on the wall was all about, fear not. Late in the day on Sunday, the True Dungeon team runs a "Riddle Reveal" in which they explain all the secrets of the year's dungeon.

Jeff went on in our interview to describe how last-minute and terribly under-publicized the first True Dungeon was. However, the whole convention was still abuzz with word about this new event, and even if you couldn't find it or get the opportunity to participate, you probably heard at least something about it.

Since that first year, the Dungeon has only grown in popularity, growing in size and incorporating more and more features. Last year marked the introduction of the Fantasy Tavern, and this year introduced the True Arena, a separate event in which players engage in a True Dungeon combat-style slider duel with one another.

To accommodate the numbers, the Dungeon this year was actually two identical versions of the same dungeon, allowing two groups to run at the same time. This year, there were just under 400 runs through the dungeon; with 7 players per run, that's almost 3,000 participants!

This year also marked the beginning of a three-year storyline arc, a new idea for the True Dungeon. The players are sucked into a cult worshipping the spider-queen, and at the end they wind up proving themselves worthy to the cult. They are directed to meet Rodney behind the Inn of the Laughing Orc, which is where next year's True Dungeon will pick up!

#### Jeff in the True Dungeon

Volunteers for the True Dungeon don't get the opportunity to go through it as players – after all, they know all the secrets! Jeff, as the man in charge of it all, is in the same boat as everyone else. He has only been through the dungeon once. As the prize for a charity auction, he accompanied the winning party through the dungeon playing the role of Patsy (from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*), complete with costume and coconuts.

#### Behind the Scenes and Into the Future

There's a lot of work that takes place behind the scenes of the True Dungeon. Not only is there one DM for each room within the dungeon, but there are also NPCs, sound operators, sales agents, organizers, builders, and – Jeff laughs – far too many computer networking specialists. The amazing part about the Dungeon is that each and every one of the people involved in it is a volunteer. Volunteers do receive a badge and a place to stay during the con, but many of those who volunteer "just for the badge" realize that it's not worth it. Still, the True Dungeon enjoys plenty of volunteers who love the event, with skills across the board to make it happen.

It takes two 54-foot semi-trailers to move the True Dungeon from its storage warehouse to Indianapolis. There are over 6,000



The wizard and cleric get some study in before braving the dungeon. Photo Chris Johnson

individual wall segments that went into the construction of the True Dungeon this year. Each wall is hand-made, down to the individual stones. Every prop in the dungeon is also hand-made, with very few store-purchased parts that can't be recreated. And, given that the volunteers have such a wide variety of skills, there are very few things that they can't just build!

#### Fun questions with Jeff!

**Silven:** If you could sum up True Dungeon in one word, what would it be?

**Jeff:** "Geekapalousa"

**Silven:** What has been your favorite True Dungeon moment to date?

**Jeff:** Easy. It happened a few months ago. My 4-year old son said one day out of the blue, "Daddy, I want to come to the shop and be a gamer and make signs for True Dungeon."

**Silven:** It's Wednesday evening; everything's set up and running pretty smoothly for Gen Con tomorrow. What are your plans for the evening?

**Jeff:** Well, we're going to break out a game, a homebrew game we made. So we're going to play that tonight. Then we're going to watch [*Monty Python and the Holy Grail*] back here. Someone brought an LCD projector, so we're going to watch *Holy Grail* on a sheet. Pretty geeky stuff.



We got to ask Jeff a few questions about the direction in which the True Dungeon is headed. At this point, he says, there isn't any plan to make the dungeon bigger, only better.

**Silven:** When designing and making revisions to the system, do you have any particular philosophy in mind?

**Jeff:** You know...I probably should have one. I can't say that I do. That sounds bad, doesn't it? I think I just do what my gut says is best. Nothing fancy.

**Silven:** How do you see the True Dungeon experience changing in the future?

**Jeff:** I hope to keep on improving it. Every year we upgrade a component here, or add a new idea there. I would like for our True Dungeon Fantasy Tavern to be the center point to a whole host of "true" geeky things to do -- not just a dungeon adventure. Gen Con Indy is the one time of year when us gaming geeks can get together and be as geeky as possible -- and really soak ourselves in it. I want to make TD more than just a dungeon adventure...I want to make it a celebration of our shared gaming culture.

In other words, I want to provide a place where gamers can lose themselves for a few days in an environment of pure geek fun.

**Silven:** A more general question: where do you see immersive gaming experiences, like True Dungeon, heading in the future?

**Jeff:** TD has proven that people are hungry for these types of events, and I hope it encourages other people like me to start these types of events. I really can't believe that no one else has tried to take his own spin on this concept. I would love to be a player and have fun at someone else's event.

Moving forward, I think it is possible that these types of events could make their way into the totally-bland world of corporate training and team building. The exercises I have attended have been so abstract and sterile...I would love for some of these people to run through TD to see how making it "true" can make the exercise so much more rewarding.

Finally, I would love to see Disney have some kind of family fantasy adventure where families could enter a "dungeon" to rescue a princess. Along the way, they would have quick little challenges that would allow the family to interact in a new way...as a problem solving team. I think it would be great fun -- and rewarding for every member of the family to see how working together can achieve goals.

**Jeff:** How can someone who is interested get involved in True Dungeon?

Just write me at [jeff@truedungeon.com](mailto:jeff@truedungeon.com) and I will forward your email to our volunteer coordinator. We will always need good volunteers, and they are what makes TD really tick.

## Acknowledgements

I'd like to extend special thanks to Jeff Martin for his two interviews, to Dana Driscoll for setting things up, Eytan Bernstein for his help on the article, and Chris Johnson for photos. Cheers!



Barbarian and monk hone their fighting skills with sliders, the iconic True Dungeon combat system.  
Photo Chris Johnson

Jeff Martin, the man behind the True Dungeon



# Foam Sword Gladiators

## How to Build a Foam Sword and Beat People With It!

by Joel “Agent X” Oberdieck and Elizabeth Koprucki

The Build a Foam Weapon Workshop was an ongoing event throughout Gen Con. It was unfortunately scheduled in a hard-to-find room, but it still seemed to be quite popular. Throughout the convention I saw people carrying around the foam swords they had made.

The technique for making a foam sword was fairly simple. It required a piece of PVC pipe as long as the sword would be, a foam swimming “noodle”, a knife, pantyhose, clear packing tape, and colored duct tape. First, the participants cut off a piece of noodle as long as they wanted their “blade” to be. Part of the pipe was left bare for the hilt, and a small piece of noodle was put on the other end for the pommel. Next, the participants cut a smaller piece of noodle in half and taped a semicircular section to the end of the blade and the pommel. Then they put the pantyhose over the foam to make it a little softer when it hit someone. (Rick, the instructor, said that he would normally cover the entire blade with clear tape.) Finally, the participants covered the hilts with colored duct tape, some of them in decorative patterns.

Patti, one of the participants, said that this was a simpler method than the one she learned, which involved contact cement. Her friends talked about coming back on one of the later days to make shields and other types of weapons, like axes.

After the workshop I talked to Rick, who, along with the other instructors, is a member of a foam fighting group called Amtgard. The name comes from Norse myth and means a world between Midgard (Earth) and Valhalla, a kind of “Viking purgatory.” Amtgard is a combination of sparring, LARPing, and reenacting Medieval combat.

Rick recommended that people interested in joining Amtgard go to the website, [www.Amtgard.com](http://www.Amtgard.com). It’s free to join, and \$1 a month in dues allows you to vote. When you start out, you can borrow equipment from other members until you get a chance to make or buy your own.

In the meantime, aspiring foam weapons fighters had another opportunity to test their skills: The Gamer Olympics. While the Gamer Olympics last year tested a participant’s skills in a variety of physical activities, this year’s Gamer Olympics revolved around a single contest: gladiatorial combat.

The theme is simple: contestants are Roman slaves who must battle trained gladiators in the arena for the amusement of the crowd. Combat is fast and furious; whenever a fighter is hit in an arm or a leg, they must not use that limb for the remainder of the combat (weapons or shields held are dropped, legs are

dragged behind the combatant), while any hit to the torso or head is a kill.

A variety of combats were staged for the amusement of the onlookers. To warm up, the gladiators, fighting either one-sword, sword-and-shield, or two-sword style, battled each other either singly or in pairs. Then, the contestants were brought out into the arena and faced one or two of the gladiators. For variety, some matches paired a contestant with another gladiator against two opponents, or had two contestants face off against two or three gladiators. After two rounds of combat, in which all combatants on one or both sides are “killed”, the audience voted on whether the defeated would live or be summarily “executed” by the victors. This vote, in standard Roman style, almost always favored the execution of the vanquished.

Also, as intermissions between contestants, random audience members would be invited to come battle a gladiator of their choosing. These fights were strictly for the audience’s amusement, and the audience member always won.



# Aces V: Charity Speed Paint and Auction

by Jeffrey E. Thetford

At Gen Con, the top 10 pro miniature painters joined together to speed paint miniatures and auction the results to raise money for charity. Money raised went to Rupert's Kids, a foundation created by *Survivor* winner Rupert Boneham to serve youth, typically ages 18-24. Through programs such as landscaping and home renovation, members of Rupert's Kids learn skills and values that will lead them toward stability in all areas of their lives. Check out their website at: [www.rupertskids.org/index.php](http://www.rupertskids.org/index.php)

Painters who donated their time and talent to the auction this year were Amy Brehm, Zach Lanier, James Craig, Angela Imrie, Marike Reimer, Tom Schadle, Dereck Schubert, Eric Johns, Rich Stedman and Sue Wachowski. The painters were allowed only one brush and one hour to paint a fantasy miniature based on Larry Elmore's paintings. This is incredible, as some of these painters can spend several hours on *one* figure.

All the miniatures were female and painted with primer so artists could start with a paint-ready figure. Larry Elmore waved a checkered flag to start the event and announced: "Painters, start your paintbrushes!" That same night, Elmore performed a blind judging of the finished miniatures. He had no idea who had painted what figure.

Winners were:

- 1st place: Derek Schubert (He won last year as well.)
- 2nd place: Sue Wachowski
- 3rd place: Marike Reimer
- 4th place: Amy Brehm
- 5th place: Rich Stedman

The painters absolutely loved doing this, especially for charity.

"Donating an hour of our time is nothing compared to the feeling we get by helping raise money for a good cause," one painter was heard saying.

Finished figures were displayed until 7 p.m. Saturday, when they were put on the auction block. A private starting bid set the bar high at \$700 dollars. A brief bidding war lasted about 5 minutes, with Chuck Balters taking home the 10 painted figures on their own carved wooden plaque for \$800. This may not sound like a bargain, but consider that painted figures from these miniature-painting greats have been known to go for several hundred dollars apiece.

## The Gen Con Auction

During the auction, amid the shouts of bids and raises, I also spoke with Frank Mentzer, who has run the Gen Con auction for the last 23 years. In the three days that the auction runs, Frank's crew auctions off more than 11,000 items, grossing more than \$100,000. You will not find a more efficient auction anywhere in the United States. The amazing part is that each seller gets paid *before* the convention ends. No checks in the mail weeks down the road.

"If the items sell in the three days, the seller gets their money by the end of the auction, if not, the item goes back to the owner, and they can try again next year," Mentzer said.

I asked Frank what was the largest bid he had ever seen at the auction.

"A year and a half ago, in California, a man was selling a 'brick' of *Magic: The Gathering* cards. When I say brick, I mean a crate of unopened decks wrapped in cellophane – literally thousands of cards. The highest bid was for \$95,000 by a private bidder. It sold."



Smooth bidding in the Gen Con auction room, just off the main exhibit hall



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# The 2006 Emmies

by Nash J. DeVita

## Disclaimer

I'm sure I'll say some things in here that some people will like. Along the same lines, I am sure I'll say some things that some people will not like. This being the case, I want to open by saying that these are opinions of my own and have no reflection upon the opinions of Silven Publishing as a whole or upon any of the other members of the Silven Press Team. Think of this as an editorial... just not by the editor!

## About the Awards

The vast majority of the speeches were short, sweet, and to the point. It seems that most were not really given much thought beforehand. Even so, there were a few things of special note that went on during the awards.

During the Best Cover Art award, I was happy to hear Green Ronin give serious credit to UDON, a fantastic art firm they have done a lot of work with.

Sovereign Press, during the Best Cartography award, gave a rough open offer for freelance work. If it wasn't an offer, it sure sounded like one to me.

Hero Press went up on the stage in style. During the award for Best Writing, two of the three people had on luchadore (Mexican wrestling style) masks. It really helped them stand out from the rest.

## Best Fan Site:

Silver: [www.farlandworld.com](http://www.farlandworld.com)

Gold: [www.yog-Sothoth.com](http://www.yog-Sothoth.com)

## Best Cover Art:

Silver: *Mastermind's Manual* (Green Ronin Publishing)

Gold: *Monte Cook's Arcana Evolved: Spell Treasury* (Malhavoc Press)

## Best Interior Art:

Silver: *Mastermind's Manual* (Green Ronin Publishing)

Gold: *Legend of the Five Rings 3rd Edition* (Alderac Entertainment Group)

## Best Cartography:

Silver: *The Shackled City Adventure Path* (Paizo Publishing)

Gold: *Dragonlance: Tasslehoff's Map Pouch: The War of the Lance*

(Sovereign Press)

## Best Production Values:

Silver: *A Game of Thrones* (Guardians of Order)

Gold: *Serenity RPG* (Margaret Weis Productions)

## Best Writing:

Silver: *Pulp Hero* (Hero Games)

Gold: *Mage: The Awakening* (White Wolf Publishing)

## Best Rules:

Silver: *Mutants & Masterminds Second Edition* (Green Ronin Publishing)

Gold: *Shadowrun Fourth Edition* (FanPro)

## Best Adventure:

Silver: *Pleasure Prison of the B'thuvian Demon Whore*

(Expeditious Retreat Press)

Gold: *The Shackled City Adventure Path* (Paizo Publishing)

## Best Adversary Product:

Silver: *Iron Heroes Bestiary* (Malhavoc Press)

Gold: *Tome of Horrors 3* (Necromancer Games)

## Best Campaign Setting:

Silver: *Freedom City Second Edition* (Green Ronin Publishing)

Gold: *The Shackled City Adventure Path* (Paizo Publishing)

## Best Supplement:

Silver: *Monte Cook's Arcana Evolved: Spell Treasury* (Malhavoc Press)

Gold: *Dragon Compendium Vol. 1* (Paizo Publishing)

## Best Aid or Accessory:

Silver: *The 13th Hour* (Midnight Syndicate)

Gold: Flip-Mat (Steel Sqwire)

## Best Free Product:

Silver: *Mage: the Awakening Demo* (White Wolf Publishing)

Gold: *Age of Worms Overload* (Paizo Publishing)

## Best Electronic Book:

Silver: *Truth & Justice* (Atomic Sock Monkey Press)

Gold: *Baba Yaga: The First Setting in Rassiya* (Dog Soul Publishing)

## Best Game:

Silver: *A Game of Thrones* (Guardians of Order)

Gold: *Mutants & Masterminds Second Edition* (Green Ronin Publishing)

## Best d20/ODL Product:

Silver: *A Game of Thrones* (Guardians of Order)

Gold: *Mutants & Masterminds Second Edition* (Green Ronin Publishing)

## Best Product:

Silver: *Mutants & Masterminds Second Edition* (Green Ronin Publishing)

Gold: *Shadowrun Fourth Edition* (FanPro)

## Special Judges' Award - Grogard Award:

For companies that represent older gaming traditions.

Silver: Goodman Games

Gold: Necromancer Games

## Special Judges' Award – Innovation:

Silver: *Truth and Justice* (Atomic Sock Monkey)

Gold: *Dread* (The Impossible Dream)

## Fan's Choice - Best Publisher:

Silver: Wizards of the Coast

Gold: Green Ronin Publishing

Green Ronin, during the Best Rules award, actually thanked the fans. I was very happy to hear this since this was the first mention of fans even though this was the seventh award category.

Also during the Best Rules, FanPro made a wonderful showing. The gentleman accepting the award had the most wonderful long, green hair. This helped him stand out from the crowd. It was not his looks, however, that made this memorable, but what he said. "People used to play *Shadowrun* despite the rules..." and now it won the gold award for Best Rules.

I was happy to hear more about *Freedom City* for *Mutants & Masterminds Second Edition* as it, as the author put it, is "everything I love about comic books."

Midnight Syndicate was great during their acceptance of the silver for Best Aid or Accessory. They thanked the entire roleplaying community. Once again, this was a first during the awards. That is shocking since that was the twelfth awards category.

Once again, Green Ronin made a special statement. In accepting the award for Best Game, they quoted their fans as saying "We're having a lot of fun playing your game," and added that that was "the nicest thing that anyone can say." The very next statement from Green Ronin, during the next award, came as a bit of a shock to some people in the audience when they stated that "d20 is not in a great spot..."

A lot of people were unhappy with a statement from FanPro shortly after. During the acceptance for the gold in Best Product, it was stated that "...d20 gives you cancer." I got a good laugh out of it and, in my opinion, it is the most quotable quote from the entire convention, but it was offensive to a number of people and probably unprofessional. I'll get back to unprofessional comments more in a bit, however, as this was not the comment I was most taken aback by.

During the Fan Choice award, once again, Green Ronin was on stage. The gentleman accepting the award stated that he was amazed that he got best product again as this is the third year

in a row for such. This was the longest speech from the entire ceremony and it was still relatively short.

### **...if you think that was offensive...**

Like I said above, the comment from FanPro, while not looked down upon by me, was considered offensive by many and was probably within the realm of unprofessional. This was far from the worst thing I heard, however.

I will not name names (or company names) since only part of this was given on stage to the entire crowd. There was a conversation at a table of one of the big winners of the evening about Guardians of Order and the awards being given to their product, *A Game of Thrones*.

Let me take an aside for just a moment and explain some of the background to you for those that do not already know. Guardians of Order was not at Gen Con Indy 2006. Sadly, GoO had to close their doors. Yes, they have very recently gone out of business. Feel free to visit [www.guardiansorder.com](http://www.guardiansorder.com) if you want the full commentary from the president, a wonderful man, Mark C. MacKinnon.

So, back to my story...

The comment was made that one writer did not understand why so many awards were being given to a company that couldn't even stay open and that the awards were not deserved. Later in the evening, on stage, he commented that fans have to buy their favored publisher's products so that publisher can be here next year.

Now, I understand that most people would agree with that comment when taken by itself. When placed in the context of the previous comment, however, it is clear that this was an intentional slight toward Mark and Guardians of Order. I refuse to support any company that is willing to make such a directly hurtful comment especially when it is about one of my favorite people and one of my favorite publishers. It is sad that such a big winner needed to be so petty.



# Interview with Apophis Consortium

by Elizabeth Koprucki

Last November, the *Silven Trumpeter* published Nash Devita's interview with Micah Skaritka, the creator of *Obsidian* and president of Apophis Consortium. While at GenCon Indy 2006, I got to meet Micah and did a follow-up interview with him.

**What have you learned from developing and publishing this game?**

I guess being in the industries that I'm in, there are always people who say, "I've got this great idea for a game!" I say, "Wow, well, it better be a really, really, *really* good idea," because if it's not, it's going to be a lot of time, and a lot of money, and a lot of aggravation. Everybody seems to think that they can make a game, and then when they go to it, it either looks like crap, or is just like something else that's out there. I can't tell you how many D&D games are out there, you know?

**You mean between all the settings and then the Open Gaming License?**

There's not a lot of original stuff out there, it seems to me. What I learned was that obviously with persistence you could build an IP [intellectual property], and we did that with *Obsidian* I think pretty well. We did it with a small amount of people, and just persistence. It is expensive, but if you're able to spread the expense out over a number of years, it's not that bad. We put out five books, the hardcover is in its second edition, and it's still selling. And we still don't have any distributorship right now.

**You sell it off the website, right?**

Yes. And we sell a lot at conventions, and we do PDFs online through DrivethruRPG.com and such, which is turning out to be cooler than I thought it was going to be. We're actually making fans who would have never normally played, you know. People travel, and when they travel they don't want to carry a bunch of books around with them, so if they can get a PDF they can read it on the computer while they're traveling. I'm hoping to do smaller adventures and modules and such in PDF format only.

**What year did you first start coming to Gen Con?**

I never went to Gen Con. It was kinda strange. My dad would always go to a fair up in Milwaukee and it always coincided, so he would stop by Gen Con and pick up a bunch of brochures and stuff for me, but I was really big into gaming anyway. I didn't have to go to Gen Con to buy my games. So I would get a lot of the gaming stuff. When we first came out with *Obsidian* we said, "Well, we should do Gen Con." So we showed up to Gen Con with one book. I mean, you still see people nowadays,

they only have one book, you know, it's their first year. So that's how we were. You try to put as many of them out on the table as you can, make it look like you've got lots of stuff even though you have one book. We got a lot of recognition that year for that one book.

**What year was that?**

That was '99.

Have you had good experiences here (at Gen Con?) Have they changed since you've been coming here?

Just tiny things, like for a corner booth you used to get two tables and four free passes. Now you get one table and two passes. I guess just financially they've changed some stuff. Other than that, the con's always been good to us. I mean, we did Origins a few times and we would break even, pretty much. Which is fine, but for all the time that all of us have to take to get off of work and do such stuff it wasn't really worth it, so we just do Gen Con now. We stopped doing some of the smaller cons even if they are local to us just because...really Gen Con is the only con that we've had that allows us to exhibit books.

**Your game has strong connections to music. Do the influences run both ways? I know the game is influenced by music, but does the game end up influencing *your* music?**

Oh, yeah! So, *Vampire* is to gothic music as *Obsidian* is to the industrial, electro music. Both music genres have the lyrics that are conducive to a certain feeling and elements. So I see this giant city belching smoke and the gears are grinding and you've got these dark evil people running around, and that's the same feeling I get when I listen to industrial music. And when I write music, every now and again I'm kinda short for ideas, and I think, "Hey, what about that thing in *Obsidian*?" I would say at least one song an album is an *Obsidian* song, whether people know it or not.

**I've seen at least one other game with a related CD. Do you see this as a growing aspect of games?**

We own the record label we're on. So we bring all of our CDs. Actually, we make half of our profit at Gen Con selling CDs. It was funny, 'cause after the first year we were selling CDs, White Wolf brought in a giant CD shop. They actually got a local CD store or something – I don't even know who it was. It was two booths wide and it was just rows of CDs. So I feel like we kind of inspired that – of course I'd think that. But in reality, I'm not sure how well CDs normally do. I think it's strange because there's a lot more people into the underground music scene coming to Gen Con, and that's why we're able to pull it off so well. If a rock band just decided "We're going to release our rock CD at Gen Con," I don't know how well that would do.

**Do you use music when you GM?**

There are a lot of early '90s industrial bands that are very minimalist when it comes to vocals, and I'll use that for atmosphere. At the same time, I'll often write music specifically

[for games] – and I’ve never released any of it. It’s music that I’ve written specifically for playing *Obsidian* at my house. It’s cool to be able to do that. I had one game where they were in this installation that was gonna be attacked. I had this CD - it was thirty minutes long, and at twenty minutes a siren starts going off on the CD. The players asked, “Why’s the siren going off?” I said, “The siren’s going off!” It was really cool to be able to work in audio to a game.

**You wrote *Obsidian* with the industrial music community in mind. Has it gotten the reception you expected among its target audience?**

Oh yeah. I mean, if you stared at our booth and looked at the people that not only hang out in the booth but the people that buy the books at the booth... it’s almost like someone will walk up - and I hate stereotyping, so I don’t do it, I try to sell the book to everybody equally - but I know the ones that are going to buy it right off the bat. It’s the guys with the zombie shirts and the “I’m so evil” shirts ...

**What about *Obsidian*’s reception with other audiences?**

Obviously, you know, people that play *White Wolf*, we usually can get them to play *Obsidian*. *Cyberpunk*, *Cthulhu* – all those kind of games. The hardest group we have of convincing to play is the *Dungeons & Dragons* players. I don’t know why, but I know that the things I did to make this game different are the things I didn’t like in D&D. I don’t like their experience system, I don’t like that you raise levels by killing stuff. Our experience system is very different, it’s very catering to roleplaying. You have four motivations, and they could be like, “Defend the core” or “Never lie” or “Never leave an enemy alive.” Each game session, if you act upon those, you get an experience point. And so that’s how you’re getting experience in our game. I like that more because it makes the players play the character they’re playing. They’re not just playing the barbarian extension of themselves.

**Have you been influenced by any literature, such as cyberpunk?**

This is a difficult thing, because I try really hard not to play other roleplaying games, and I try really hard not to read science fiction. Because I like to assume that all my ideas are mine, if that makes sense. Obviously, my childhood of watching horror movies and sci-fi movies has trickled in to the writing, but other than that... I don’t want to purposefully steal anybody’s ideas.

When I was looking through *Obsidian* I noticed some interesting combinations of elements – post-apocalyptic industrial horror but also a struggle of good versus evil. How did you come up with these ideas, such as that humans are the ones that created Hell?

Good research. That’s true. In the book, humans are the ones that corrupted Hell – Hell was actually a nice place. It was a different existence that fed off of Earth and eventually became tainted by Earth’s energy.

I’ve always been fascinated by the apocalypse. I’ve always had these theological debates with people, you know – why not meld that together? But not make it angels and demons, but make it survival, humans’ basic survival. The world is wiped out and the only thing that’s left are humans and demons. I guess, if you really look at it, humans could be angels.

So the combat isn’t on the supernatural world, it’s on the natural world where these things come together?

Well, yeah. But there’s definitely supernatural activity.

**What are your plans for the future?**

I’m going to get all of our books on PDF so that we can cater to that audience. We’re still working on the Europe corebook, which will be another hardcover book. It’s a grand project – it takes a lot of effort, a lot of people, a lot of money. If it comes out, it’ll be really cool. It’ll be an accomplishment that I’ve only done once before, with the core book. Supplements – they’re a challenge to themselves, but they’re not as difficult as doing a main book, because [in the main book] you have to get the mechanics down. You have to make sure people understand how the game works. So it’s an achievement.

**So where do you see Apophis Consortium in a year, both the game side and the record label?**

The record label is a child company to Apophis, which is the parent company. The record label’s been doing really well. We’ve been selling lots of stuff, we’ve been signing new bands. Cruciform’s sold out of three albums already – we only have two left, including the one that just came out. But as far as Apophis goes, I’d really like to get the Europe book done, and we are working on a PDF adventures book which we’ll put up through DrivethruRPG hopefully by Christmas.

**What about in five years?**

That would depend on how the Europe book was selling.

**Best case scenario?**

I could retire a millionaire... Actually, my future goal for *Obsidian* is to really delve into the IP itself. I’d like to do a video game, and a movie based on it.

**I heard you’ve been doing some video games lately?**

My full-time job is video game design. I work at High Voltage. We’ve done tons of cool games – we just finished up the Family Guy video game. That should be out this October or November.

Thanks again to Micah Skaritka for taking the time for this interview during the busy four days of Gen Con!



# The Birth of *Dungeons & Dragons*

by Michael J. Thompson

*Dungeons and Dragons*, the very first roleplaying game, was created from the minds of miniature wargamers Dave Arneson and Gary Gygax. It wasn't an overnight creation, however; the process of moving from historical miniatures combat to pen-and-paper and dice was a slow process, and one that did not meet immediate approval from everyone. The story of its creation was told at Gen Con Indy by Ross Maker, one of the original playtesters of D&D, and Bob Bledsaw, founder of Judges Guild and developer of many of the rules and concepts introduced in *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*.

In 1968, Gary Gygax founded the Castle & Crusade Society, a chapter of the International Federation of Wargamers (IFW). Dave Arneson was a member with his own gaming group. As with many miniatures enthusiasts, both Gygax and Arneson tweaked existing rules and created their own rulesets to cater to their own gaming groups. One such ruleset was known as *Chainmail*.

Miniatures combat, including games using *Chainmail*, was strictly historical simulation, with no fantasy elements involved. That all changed, however, with the growing popularity of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy on college campuses. While Gary Gygax initially wasn't interested in fantasy combat, Dave Arneson (and his fellow gamers) took to the idea of Tolkeinesque battles more readily. After some development and testing, a four-page fantasy supplement was appended to the *Chainmail* rules. By the release of the third edition rules, *Chainmail* had converted completely to fantasy miniatures combat.

In the early seventies, the idea of roleplaying in fantasy worlds became increasingly popular. Dave Arneson worked on his *Blackmoor* campaign, continually adding rules and

new ideas. The mass combat rules of *Chainmail* were adapted to individual combat by Gygax, but they were originally so complex they were virtually unplayable. Gygax began corresponding with Arneson to create a new type of game based off of their respective work in *Chainmail* and *Blackmoor*. In 1974, the small boxed-set of *Dungeons & Dragons* went on sale through hobby stores and via mail order. Despite having no advertising whatsoever, the game quickly became a sold-out success.

Supplements to the core rules were also selling well. The first to print was *Greyhawk*, the world developed by Gary Gygax. *Eldritch Wizardry* was the second title, notable in many gaming veterans' minds as "the one with the naked woman on the cover." *Blackmoor* was the third release in 1975; later *Blackmoor* and the city of *Greyhawk* would be combined into the *World of Greyhawk*.

Around 1975, Bob Bledsaw was also working with fantasy rules in his campaigns. He developed a massive world called the *Wilderlands* and presented it to Gygax and TSR for them to publish. They refused, thinking that the public would not be interested in buying adventures. However, TSR had no concerns with allowing Bledsaw to publish game materials on his own. At the time there were no copyright laws covering roleplaying games, and TSR didn't think he'd sell anything anyway.

So began the glory days of the Judges Guild. *The City State of the Invincible Overlord* was the first campaign setting produced, followed quickly by the *Wilderlands of High Fantasy*. At its peak, Judges Guild had over 250 products in print. Bob played a key role in the development of the game, especially the 1st edition of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*. About one-third of the 1st edition *Dungeom Master's Guide* was based off of the rules, charts, lists, and monsters that Bob had developed for his own *Wilderlands* campaigns. He streamlined a number of confusing or contradictory rules, and essentially created the concept of wilderness adventures.

Both TSR and the original Judges Guild are gone now, but they survive in Wizards of the Coast (who bought TSR in the late 1990's) and the new Judges Guild (still owned by Bob Bledsaw). They continue to publish interesting and creative products for the gaming industry.

Ross Maker (left) and Bob Bledsaw (right)



# Relax, The Industry is Not Doomed, and Neither Are You

by Eytan Bernstein

It's certainly not what you want to wake up in the morning and read. You're going about your business, writing the final touches on your third-party module, looking over your proposal for a magazine article, and mentally reshuffling your projects for the next few weeks.

You remember something you meant to check on a gaming site, so you sign on. While checking the news and articles on a company you are in talks with on a project, you decide to skim through the topics on the message boards. You're scrolling through topics on the alignment of television characters, the difficulties of DMing groups with mixed ages, and the ever-present complaints about the lack of friendly local gaming stores when you stumble upon something completely unexpected – an actual verified confirmation that 4th edition *Dungeons & Dragons* is nearly upon us.

You immediately scroll through the posts, trying to make sense of what's being said, and processing conjecture from real information. Suddenly, your writing, editing and proposals are shoved into the deep recesses of the mind so you can concentrate on something truly important – a fundamental shift in everything we know about roleplaying games. With the click of a mouse, a single post sent ripples throughout a community of designers, editors, developers, staffers and pundits.

Sitting stunned at your computer, you wonder if you will be able to cope with the change to a new edition. You imagine a bleak scenario where major companies toss their old designers in the trash, favoring young blood with a fresh attitude toward new material. You worry that the system will focus almost exclusively on miniatures, leaving behind those with little experience in this form of design. You fear that the new edition will be a complete flop, forever closing the doors on 40 years of pen-and-paper gaming evolution.

If you are worried by a new edition, how will fans with no knowledge of the publication process deal with it? Will they completely reject the edition, feeling that it is just an attempt to gouge them for more money? Will you join them? Given the combination of a weak economy, a new edition, and the rise in massive multiplayer online roleplaying games (MMORPG), will the RPG industry be able to compete?

Days pass, and theories run wild. Everyone you talk to has heard conflicting stories from people “in the know.” Some claim insiders have confirmed this terrifying rumor; others assert that the very same officials have completely quashed such sentiments, saying that there will be no new edition in the next year and a half. Whom do you listen to?

Then, as quickly as the rumor arose, the very same person who started it takes it back, citing an official source that countered the claim. Despite this, Pandora's box cannot be closed. While

the immediate issue has been resolved, the damage has been done.

For months before this rumor, possibly even years, a growing “doom and gloom” sentiment has been pervasive among insiders and commentators in the industry. Each individual has an opinion on where things are going, but they all seem to conflict. All of these opinions are voiced by extremely intelligent people; this is the one thing that is not in question. But if these people are all smart, how is it that none of them can agree on the future of gaming?

Having heard the many rumors, conjectures, assurances, and naysaying, you decide to hedge your bets. You begin to plan products that do not use the d20 rules, seeing them as a complement to your d20 stable. In case 4th edition comes and there is no more OGL, you want to be prepared. You hear that this is what all of the big publishers are doing, so you decide that it wouldn't be a bad idea for your company to do the same. Doing this makes for a good insurance policy and opens up your company to the market uninterested in d20. If your products can be used in any setting or system, they should reach a bigger audience, right? At least that is the prevailing notion. You decide to play the market, maintaining your d20 presence to keep up with change, but diversify in case of a complete overhaul.

Just as you are finishing commissioning non-d20 products, you hear an absolute confirmation from Wizards of the Coast that indicates Wizards will absolutely not release a 4th edition before 2008. This idea is backed up by the notion that WotC staffers and freelancers are hard at work on a big slate of products to release all the way through the end of 2007. This seems somewhat reassuring, but you wonder if the statement is somehow implying that 4th edition will be released in 2008. Combined with the comment that Wizards of the Coast plans to put out its major press releases at Winter Fantasy, does it mean that the company will announce the new edition in the winter of 2007?

Even if it does mean that Wizards of the Coast is planning on announcing 4th edition in the winter of 2007, it doesn't mean that the RPG world as we know it is coming to an end. A new edition might be better, fixing the major complaints repeated by fans and designers time and again. Maybe it will include smoother combat with easier rules for maneuvers. Perhaps it will make a psionics system more palatable to old and new players alike.

Regardless of the quality or nature of the new system, RPG companies need not fear the collapse of the industry. If anything, a new system might mean integrating marketing concepts that help to bring in all of the players lost to MMORPGs, collectible card games and other intersecting industries. It is hoped the new edition will have improvements that make it easier to bring in new players, especially children.

Regardless of what happens with 4th edition or when it gets released, the focus of existing companies should be to produce quality products; to maintain or develop reasonable marketing and production processes; and to keep up with the



changes, evolutions, and innovations in RPG development and technology. It's true some publishers will disappear. That is always a risk in any sort of business. The RPG industry may be hurting, but there is clearly still interest in it. If it wasn't important, no people would be talking about the doom of gaming on message boards, whispering about the worries of a new edition in the nooks of the Indianapolis convention center, or conducting online or in-person staff meetings to adjust company marketing strategies. All of this shows that people still care about the industry. As long as this remains true, the RPG industry will not die.

We cannot be frightened by change, but we also can't abandon our core gaming interests and values. Perhaps the economy will improve in the next few years. After all, recessions come and go, and booms come just as easily. If 4th edition is timed correctly, it could coincide with economic improvement, making it possible for the rest of the industry to ride its coattails. It's far too early to speculate on the success of 4th edition – despite many message board topics making jabs at books that have yet to be released.

But even if it isn't a great improvement, all hope is not lost. Other companies produce RPG products of great quality. The guys at FanPro have made an awesome 4th edition for *Shadowrun*. White Wolf is alive and kicking with *Vampire the Requiem* and the other reinvented games in its *World of Darkness*. Palladium may have had a near disastrous collapse, but financial support by fans helped it to continue. Green Ronin has modified d20 games popular with even those fed up with the core D&D rules. Along with these games, *Dungeons & Dragons* will continue to live. The people involved in its continued creation are as devoted as the most loyal fan. They care about the fun of a great gaming session, the satisfaction of the development of an incredible campaign, and the ability for the game to stay fresh and new as much as you do.

The RPG industry is not dying; it's just rolling over some rocky ground. This isn't the first time this has happened – remember the recession of 1999? – and it probably won't be the last time. Soon after that recession, 3rd edition came out, turning around the entire industry. If a 4th edition comes out, it's possible that it may be the revitalization that the industry needs. Until then, the best decision publishers and fans can make is to continue to come up with new and innovative products, to continue to enjoy the games we play and create, and to continue to look forward to new developments. New editions draw from the successes and advances of other products, so if we devote our companies to improving their creations, this will rub off on the giants of the industry. Even now, companies are experimenting with embedded audio; planning to develop useful and ingenious new map, token and card accessories; striving to create games that merge books with other media; and working to create exciting and fresh takes on classic concepts.

It's fine if this all sounds a bit too positive for some readers. A certain amount of constructive criticism and disagreement is necessary for any community to thrive. Without differences of opinion, no new developments will emerge.

It would be foolish to assume that things will automatically get better or that every company will survive. Maybe 4th edition will come out in 2008 and perhaps it won't be good. But why worry about this? There may be something to be gained from respectful discussions of existing problems, but complaining about things that have yet to happen and that we know nothing about is pointless. If we took the time wasted on naysaying, doom-and-gloom proclamations, and whining about existing products before they're even printed, and concentrated on putting these critiques to use in our own work, we might actually accomplish what everyone is complaining about. Rather than just scrawling vitriolic arguments across the screen, try writing respectful suggestions or even criticisms to the staff. You'd be surprised at how much they listen, even if you never hear back.

While message boards are a useful tool and it would be foolish not to use them, we must step back and realize that little good can come from the culture of unflagging negativity that has been created in the last few years. Discussion is fine, but if these complaints really mean something, go out and implement them in your projects. Wizards staff members read the comments and know what people are saying. They implement changes and alter development accordingly.

The time for constant complaints should come to an end, and should be replaced by an era of collective innovation and cooperation. We should be ready to move on and work toward the innovations we all want and that will be necessary for the industry to ascend to the heights we envision. It's likely that such a utopian vision of the RPG world will not come into being, but if even a few companies start working toward this – as some are already doing – there is no reason to think that the industry or your personal stake in it are doomed.

If anything, we should all take a deep breath and relax. Our livelihood and passion is not about to disintegrate, and even the most fundamental change is something we can work through. No one works full time in the RPG industry because it's lucrative. We do it because we love it. No matter what happens with future editions, economic recessions and message board mutinies, the love for gaming will sustain the industry through whatever arises.

# THE DEATHLESS STALKER

by Elias Aamot

## About the Author

Elias Aamot is a student living in the cold northern country of Norway. He was introduced to roleplaying at the age of 6 by his older brother, and since that very moment his entire life has been about gaming.

Once in a while, he walks out of his basement to write articles on character development and d20 features; however he spends most his time in that cellar playing role-playing games with his friends, or discussing what to write next.

This single encounter is intended to twist the minds of a high-powered party. Although it can be utilized with any group of characters, higher-level parties are more likely to be shocked when their attacks have no effect.

The focus of this encounter, the deathless stalker, is an immortal creature born of the gods as a perfect creature, never meant to really understand death as he is simply immortal. Death is not something he ever has to relate to and, as a result, he does not fully understand the concept.

The stalker wanders the planes restlessly and can therefore encounter the party at any time. Placing this encounter in a perilous location enhances its dramatic effect.

## The Purpose

The purpose of this encounter is to give the players a break from the standard hack-and-slash D&D and therefore includes no fighting, but must instead be resolved through roleplaying. This may not fit well with every party, however, as many characters will be angered if some “immortal creature” steals an important piece of equipment for no reason. Therefore, the GM is responsible for making sure the purpose of the stalker is understood by the party.

## The Encounter

Sometime during the night, the sentry on watch duty sees a humanoid creature enter the camp and begin searching until he discovers an interesting item (something the party *can* lose but would hate to, such as the wizard's spellbook or important weapon). The stalker obtains the item regardless of any protests from the party, including physical and magical resistance. Once the item is within his possession, he sits down in an appropriate location, such as by a campfire, to examine it. He will then indulge in conversation with the party if they are interested in speaking with him.

If the party attempts to regain their item by resorting to violence, the stalker merely looks upon them trying to figure out the reason behind their deeds, as he cannot understand the benefit of violence and wonders what they are trying to

accomplish by it. Should the party attempt to converse with the stalker, he is more than willing to speak with them, as he relishes the opportunity to attain new lore of this world and maybe have a chance to better understand the concepts of various “emotions” he has heard so much about. If the party ignores him or attempts to attack him, he simply leaves with his newly acquired item after about one minute passes.

If the party begins conversing with the stalker they soon learn that he possesses many more magical items of different types, and that he would easily give up his newly acquired one if he believes the party is worth his time. His knowledge is quite vast and he is more than willing to demonstrate that fact by sharing it with the party. He also hopes that the party can improve his knowledge even further.

## The Resolution

Once the conversational part of the encounter begins, make two piles of 10 tokens. These are used to keep track of the stalker's current attitude. Pick one of these piles to be the “good” pile and one to be the “bad” pile. Every time one of the characters says something the stalker enjoys hearing, transfer a token from the “bad” pile into the “good” pile. Anytime any of the characters discuss a topic the stalker dislikes or finds boring, move a token from the “good” pile into the “bad” pile.

## The stalker enjoys:

- *Laughing.* Making the GM laugh is always productive, but this is particularly true now.
- *Knowledge.* He lives for knowledge. If the party manages to give him information that he does not yet know, he shivers from excitement.
- *Understanding for human feelings.* He frequently mentions how he has difficulty understanding others.
- *Tips on what to see and experience.* Capable of living forever, the stalker is able to taste any food in the multiverse, see every legendary site, and do all the dangerous stuff. Therefore, he would like some good tips on where to go and what to do.

## The stalker dislikes:

- *Death.* He has never been able to understand it. He is frustrated by concepts he can't understand, and even more frustrated when reminded that there are things he can't comprehend.
- *Reproduction.* He does not understand the pleasure in breeding, either. As a genderless creature who realizes many species enjoy this activity, knowing he'll never experience it bothers him.
- *Not understanding human emotions.* He has only very limited feelings, so he frequently needs to have emotional responses explained to him.

What else the stalker enjoys is ultimately up to the GM, but he



generally likes learning new things. He will attempt to give a good indication of what he likes and dislikes, so the characters can understand it if they try to figure it out. In the end, however, it is up to the GM to decide how he reacts to any given situation, but keep in mind that he is not a human, nor does he think like one. Upon observation, one might even say he acts childish, as he is likely to simply walk away once he becomes bored or frustrated enough.

Essentially, the stalker is actually just looking for a good time. If the party manages to entertain him, he will give back the stolen item, and even reward them further with another item from his personal possessions. The encounter lasts for a set amount of time, as decided beforehand by the GM. Five minutes of real time from the moment the party begins conversing with the stalker should suffice. If there is an equal amount of "good" and "bad" tokens at the end, the encounter ends with the stalker returning the purloined item. If there are more "bad" than "good" tokens, the stalker simply walks or dimensionally repositions (see below) away with his new acquisition. If there are more "good" than "bad" tokens, the party is awarded XP for dealing with an encounter equal to their own CR, as well as one random major magic item from the stalker for each "good" token above 15.

### Deathless Stalker

#### Medium Outsider (extraplaner)

**Hit Dice:** 20d8-20 (70 hp)

**Initiative:** +8 (+4 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

**Speed:** 30 ft. (6 squares), burrow 30 ft., fly 30 ft. (perfect), swim 30 ft.

**Armor Class:** 14 (+4 Dex), touch 14, flat-footed 10

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +20/+21

**Attack:** Dagger +22 (1d4+1)

**Full Attack:** Dagger +22 (1d4+1)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft./5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** -

**Special Qualities:** Alter reality, darkvision 60 ft., dimensional reposition, eternal freedom, immortal, lore, polyglot

**Saves:** Fort +13, Ref +18, Will +13

**Abilities:** Str 12, Dex 18, Con 8, Int 36, Wis 9, Cha 7

**Skills:** Autohypnosis +22, Balance +27, Escape Artist +27, Gather Information +23, Hide +27, Knowledge (All) +66, Listen +22, Move Silently +27, Search +36, Sense Motive +22, Spellcraft +38, Spot +22

**Feats:** Dodge, Endurance, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Mobility

**Environment:** Any

**Organization:** Solitary

**Challenge Rating:** -

**Treasure:** 4d6 major magical items

**Alignment:** Always neutral

**Advancement:** By character class

**Level Adjustment:** -

**Alter Reality (Ex):** A deathless stalker can alter reality once per day as per the spell *wish* as if cast by a 20th level wizard. A deathless stalker does not have to pay the XP cost associated with the spell, however.

**Dimensional Reposition (Ex):** A deathless stalker has the ability to reposition himself at any time, during any situation, to any position in the multiverse as a free action. Any equipment he carries, and any persons holding his hands, are repositioned as well (Will save versus DC 17 negates if the target is not willing).

**Eternal Freedom (Ex):** A deathless stalker is immune to the following specific effects, spells and spell-like-abilities: *entangle*, *hold*, *imprisonment*, *paralysis*, *petrification*, *sleep*, *slow*, *stunning*, *temporal stasis*, and *web*.

**Immortal (Ex):** A deathless stalker cannot be hurt by any sort of physical or elemental damage or by magic. He is not affected by any effects which would be harmful, negative, or unfortunate for him.

**Lore (Ex):** The deathless stalker has wandered the multiverse long enough to know much about everything. He has a +30 circumstance modifier to all Knowledge skill checks due to this fact. He is also able to use bardic knowledge as a 20th level bard.

**Polyglot (Ex):** A deathless stalker can read and speak any language.

A deathless stalkers appears as a lightly built humanoid, standing about 7 feet tall, and weighing about 150 pounds. Its skin is extremely pale, as no blood flows through it, and it has absolutely no hair. It usually dresses in simple black robes which may have several small tears or rips as a result of other recent encounters. Due to its withered looks, a deathless stalker can easily be mistaken for undead. This has led to many unfortunate encounters.

Its CR is – as it is an immortal creature and cannot be defeated by conventional means. Any encounter with a deathless stalker can only be won through roleplaying with the award for completing the encounter based on the party's experience and effort.

# A Guide to Character Development

by Elias Aamot

Imagine yourself sitting at the game table, memorizing every ability written on your character sheet when the game master asks, “What does your character think about this?” As the words flow from the game master’s lips, you suddenly realize that you have no idea who this character *is*, you only know the stats you read from your character sheet. Sure, you know how well he wields his magically burning sword, but you have no clue what your character’s reaction would be in a given situation. While it does not apply to everyone, quite a few players have absolutely no idea what their characters would do in any given situation, so they act according to what *they* would have done when faced with the same challenges. They may never have considered why the party is actually a party and what possible reason could explain why the PCs should stay together. While that is not necessarily a bad thing, it doesn’t exactly promote good roleplaying, nor does it help the feel of realism.

This guide is made for players wanting to enhance the personalities and backgrounds of their existing characters, as well as players developing new characters to play in upcoming sessions. The text presented here is merely a guideline, not a recipe. Everyone is unique, so everyone’s character should be, too. Use this guide as a tool to figure out what fits you and your group best.

## Step One: Clear your mind and catch the basics

When using a rules-heavy system such as the d20 system, it is easy to sacrifice a little realism for the sake of character game-play stats. This often results in a situation where the game dictates what character to play, rather than letting you decide, and that kills some of the fun of roleplaying. Therefore, whether you’re developing your character further or creating a new one, clear your mind completely of the game you are playing. Forget about the rules, never mind their restrictions or opportunities. If you are working on a pre-existing character, ask your game master if you can rip your character sheet apart and remake the character from scratch. Use a separate piece of paper to note down the few things you need to keep, but try to limit these to as little as possible. If you can’t rewrite, put the character sheet away while you work on your character.

Although you now have a fairly clean slate, you must retain some boundaries. First of all, yours is not the only character in the group. While that may seem painfully obvious, it is important to remember. Having a valid reason for the PCs being together enhances roleplaying within the group. This could take the form of a theme such as ‘Divine Warriors of the Solar Deity Tremor’ or ‘Boy Scouts’, a similar attitude (all the way from ‘Absolutely Beneficent’ to ‘Ultra-cool’), or a similar goal (either short term, like ‘visit the holy oracle’ or long term, like ‘overthrow the undead millennium king of the night lands’). Giving the characters a common bond will go a long

way toward a successful campaign. Speaking of campaigns, not every character fits into any campaign. While playing a robot or something similar would be cool, it is probably not *that* cool with a robot in an ice-age setting. Design your character in keeping with the campaign’s genre and feel.

Once you feel like you’ve established your character concept in a party- and campaign-compatible fashion, note a few keywords that define the core of your character. These keywords might mostly contain technical details like “Wields a sub-machinegun” or “Healing Magic.” While these details are important to know, try to come up with a few personality descriptors, special behavior, and background/history as well. This process could go rather quickly when adding depth to existing characters, but not necessarily when creating a new character. When creating a character from scratch, you might not even know what you want to play. Two main problems trouble players during this phase of character development: either you have absolutely no idea what sort of person your PC will be or you have multiple, equally tempting ideas competing with one another.

If you lack a concept, look beyond yourself for inspiration. Think of a childhood hero, a character from a videogame or a book, or a real life person. Now, figure out what makes this person so special that he popped into your mind, rather than some other person. Determine which qualities attract you to this character and which you can do without. Still stuck? Try a composite of more than one fictional and/or real life characters. Add layers and mix and match traits until you are pleased with the combination. On the other hand, if you have way too many ideas whirling around your head, reduce and simplify. Do you really want to play all of these concepts with equal zeal? Drop those that don’t excite you, then, determine which of the remaining traits will contribute the most to the storyline (and to your own enjoyment). If all this fails, turn to other members of the gaming group. They would probably be more than happy to help you create a character that contributes to the synergy of the group.

## Step Two: Approval and fleshing out

Even after you’ve determined what kind of character to play, you should consult the party and, especially, your game master to ensure compatibility within the group. If your character doesn’t fit the campaign, you should ask your GM to explain what doesn’t work, and figure out whether you need to completely remake your character or just alter the concept slightly. Unless you’re playing as a foil for another PC, *and* you can figure out a *good* reason for him to adventure with the rest of the party, try to avoid playing a misfit. Once the game master approves your concept, you simply need to build upon the foundation you have created.

Take a glance at your keywords. Try expanding each keyword into a sentence. “Healing Magic” might evolve into “She masters healing magic granted to her by the gods, but she can also cast spells for protection and survival, and a little offensive magic, too.” “Greedy” may become “He will never part with any gold pieces unless he is sure that he receives good value in return, and though he rewards good service, he won’t spare a single coin for poor beggars.” Go further and try to find the reason



behind every major aspect of the character, but be careful to avoid cheap solutions to your problems like “A thief stole his piggy bank when he was a child, so he cannot trust anyone ever again.” While traumatic happenings in the past affect characters, don’t make them dominant. If traumatic events happened to the character, consider making their consequences different from what anyone would expect.

Once the primary aspects of a character are fleshed out, create a few secondary traits. The greedy mercenary might be somewhat religious and may have developed cooking skills as a youth. An astronaut might write romance novels, or obsess over soap operas to the point that he rewires his ship’s communications system to pick up the daily broadcast of “As the Planet Turns.” When developing a pre-existing character further, this would be the place for putting all those non-adventuring hobbies and skills the character has learned in his lifetime.

### Step Three: Filling the gaps

Now that you’ve constructed a supporting frame of secondary attributes around your character’s core concept, it is time to fill in the gaps. Grab another sheet of paper or, preferably, a computer to write on. Write as many of the following points in as much detail as you want, depending on the time and effort you want to spend creating your character. Don’t worry if you don’t get everything down the first time. You can return, filling in more details as needed.

The main points to fill out are:

- Appearance and physicality
- Life and lifestyle
- Relations
- Morals, religion, and attitude
- Motivation and psychology

**Appearance and Physicality:** Character race (and subtype), gender, age, height, and weight fall under this category. Hairstyle and color, eye color, skin tone, general dress, and appearance do, too. Does he have any physical defects, weaknesses, or distinguishing marks?

**Life and Lifestyle:** Where did the character grow up? Did he have a caring, nurturing family or did he grow up on the rough streets as an orphan? What challenges did he overcome? How did his background contribute to the person he is today? What does he do when he isn’t adventuring?

**Relations:** How does the character feel about himself? How does he relate to family and friends? How does he react to strangers? Is he shy and reserved or self-confident and extroverted? Does he see the best in people or practice a healthy cynicism?

**Morals, Religion and Attitude:** Does your character have a religious affiliation? Is he devout in his beliefs? Does he believe in karma? How tolerant is he of others’ differing beliefs? Is there a cause for which he would sacrifice his own life? Would he sacrifice the lives of others? Does he act within the law or use it only when it suits his purpose?

**Motivation and Psychology:** What drives and motivates your character? Ambition? Pride? Guilt? Is he selfless or a little bit selfish? What goals has he set for himself? What are his dreams? What fears might he harbor? Does he have any secrets? Is he coldly calculating and logical or impulsive and sensual? Does he have any vices or eccentric behaviors?

Once you’ve answered the above questions, you should have a much more complete and colorful picture of your character than when you started. By now, you should not only visualize the character, but be able to get “into his skin,” so to speak.

### Step Four: Returning to the rules

With your character concept fleshed out, you now need to tie it in with the game mechanics for the system you are playing. If you’ve added depth and description to a pre-existing character, you are now done. If great differences remain between your character concept and his mechanical stats, complain to your game master again, but most likely you will have to live with it. If you were allowed to revise your character’s stats while refining his personality, forget about his past persona and concentrate on your new character as a unique individual. Now, get out there and start having fun with your new character; just watch out for that deathtrap in the next room.

### About the Author

Elias Aamot is a student living in the cold northern country of Norway. He was introduced to roleplaying at the age of 6 by his older brother, and since that very moment his entire life has been about gaming.

Once in a while, he walks out of his basement to write articles on character development and d20 features; however he spends most his time in that cellar playing role-playing games with his friends, or discussing what to write next.

# JUNGLE WORLD: A d20 MODERN CAMPAIGN STARTER

by David Caffee

## Introduction

Jungle World is a campaign starter that propels characters into an apocalyptic future where civilization has crumbled, and climate changes have raised the oceans and covered the land with tropical eco-systems. Surviving in this harsh tomorrow and uncovering the truth about the past form the campaign's initial seeds.

This article contains a short adventure where characters wake from cryogenic stasis to find themselves surrounded by ruins and untamed wilderness. Also included is an overview of the jungles of North America and notes for expanding the adventure. The rules use the *d20 Modern* system, although the campaign is adaptable to other systems.

## Getting Players Involved

The introductory adventure can be used as a transition from a present-day campaign to a sci-fi or post-apocalyptic setting. It can also serve as a standalone campaign for new characters.

The adventure can accommodate any character type. All players need to know is that their characters should be appropriate for a game set in the near future. In this case, the near future is defined as a world where technology is slightly more advanced, but the world's cultural and political scene is little changed.

A Navy SEAL, a bank robber, a teenage paperboy or a middle-aged tax attorney: It doesn't matter what a character's background is so long as he is a person living sometime around the year 2017. Players won't need to bother with wealth and possessions.

## Getting Started

### Read to Players:

You find yourself floating in darkness. Everything is black and cold, like a nightmare about drowning beneath a frozen pond. You feel chilled to your core. You want to scream, but something has been shoved down your throat, gagging you. You bite down and taste plastic. You try to move but your limbs are stiff and ache.

Suddenly you burst into the light. The cold liquid surrounding you drains away as a painfully bright light shines above. Seconds

crawl by as your trembling hands pull the tube from your throat. Your eyes adjust as your disorientation fades.

You are lying in a coffin-shaped metal box coated with rubberized padding. A piece of curved glass hangs above you, a covering that once enclosed your capsule. You are nude, and a thick, yellowish liquid covers everything around. The substance is sticky and cold, a lingering reminder of the frozen terror you just experienced. IV lines protrude from your chest, neck and legs, restricting your movements and partially pinning you to the container's walls.

As your strength returns, you remove the needles from your flesh and pull yourself from the cramped chamber. Other shivering, naked bodies lie in nearby capsules.

*(GMs should pause to allow PCs a chance to react and interact.)*

### Read to Players:

hile life returns to your uncooperative muscles, you cannot seem to clear the fog penetrating your minds. None of you has any clue how you ended up in these chambers. Your memories are fuzzy. While you recall facts about your life, your most-recent memories are a blur. A clue that might explain your condition is that each of you bears scars you can't explain. Each of these healed wounds is evidence of a serious injury or surgery.

*(The GM may elaborate on the injuries, matching them to each character's background. For instance, a race car driver may be covered with burn scars while a police officer may find a long-healed bullet wound in his neck.)*

**The Cryogenics Room:** The room characters awaken in is a long rectangle made from crumbling cement blocks. The roof has partially collapsed, and holes let in sunlight. A thick layer of dust, leaves and cobwebs covers everything. Doors are in the middle of the short walls. The northern door is slightly ajar and wedged into its frame. The southern door is open, and a warm breeze blows from that direction.

Eighteen cryo-pod containers, including the four from which PCs emerged, fill the room. Nine cryogenic chambers are active, with seven containing living people. Two contain human skeletons floating in a brackish liquid. Five chambers are open and empty. Closer examination reveals ant-sized robots moving along the bodies. Robotic armatures are also at work, making their way through thick, yellow liquid. Control panels on the capsules are dirty and broken. Those that haven't ceased functioning display a faint warning: *Low Power: Returning to stand-by mode. All medical procedures will be terminated.*

**The Northern Door:** A DC 15 Strength check is required to force open the door. If opened, the door flies from its rusted hinges and falls 60 feet, crashing into the waves below. The floor continues a few feet before ending. Looking out the doorway, PCs see water in every direction. Scanning the cliff below reveals jagged chunks of concrete and rust-red metal protruding from the choppy water. A section of the building fell victim to massive landslides.



**The Southern Room:** The room south of the cryogenics room has fallen apart. The roof and walls crumbled, and moss and vines cover the rubble. Thick layers of loess coat the floor, providing fertile soil for weeds and shrubbery. The floor at the opposite end of the room collapsed into the basement below, and a tree grows from the lower level, its trunk partially blocking the hole.

**Underground Chamber 1:** A DC 12 Climb check is needed to get down the tree. The basement has 8-foot-high ceilings, and moss-covered rubble litters the floor. A PC who falls suffers 2d6 points of damage. A character who makes a DC 11 Reflex save takes half damage. A successful DC 15 Tumble check negates damage completely.

The chamber is empty save for the massive tree thriving in a sunlit patch below the crumbled ceiling. The hole is an effective trap for leaves and dead plants, which fill the room with the stench of decaying vegetation. The room is dark save for scattered sunlight and a flickering light from a door along the opposite wall.

**Underground Chamber 2:** A second basement room sits directly underneath the cryogenics room and mirrors its shape. The flickering light emanates from a broken computer monitor sitting on a desk along the northern wall. Set into the long walls are rows of metal vaults, one vault for each of the 18 cryo-chambers in the room above.

Fine dust covers the floor. Undisturbed footprints dot the floor, indicating someone has been through this room. A DC 20 Survival check reveals two sets of tracks made several years apart. A successful DC 10 Search check lets PCs find a disk on the desk. Faded lettering on the sealed case reads, "For the recently awakened."

**The Disk:** This storage device has obviously been left for PCs and may explain how and why they ended up in this predicament. Unfortunately, the characters have no way to play the disk unless they find a still-functioning computer.

Should characters piece together the needed computer equipment, they are greeted by a video message. An aging man wearing a suit and lab coat introduces himself as Dr. Mitchell:

"You are likely wondering where you are and, perhaps more importantly, when you are. I can answer the first question. The facility where you have been stored was once owned by Cryotech USA, an experimental research firm.

"I represent a collaboration of scientists working on a problem that threatens our world. After years of consultation, data collection and theoretical modeling, we cannot escape the fact that our planet is heading into an age of darkness, driven by a conjunction of man-made disasters.

Worse, we are forced to admit there is nothing we can do to stave off this threat. Our last option is to do our best to lift humanity from the aftermath. With this purpose, I selected scientists and experts with the necessary knowledge and skills to

rebuild our world. Our group acquired the funds to purchase Cryotech USA's primary storage site. The deal came with the provision that we maintain responsibility for the subjects already in storage. The team I put together was placed in cryogenic stasis using the facility's empty cryo-chambers. Those of us left behind have done our best to maintain the facility and prepare it to operate autonomously.

"Only a few of us are left. The electrical grid failed, and it is impossible to find supplies. Food is becoming scarce; we are surviving on what we grow ourselves. The windmills and solar panels should keep the cryogenic equipment functioning after we are gone. I cannot say how long it will take for the medical robots to repair your sleeping bodies, nor can I say what kind of world you will awaken to. You will find time-sealed vaults in the lower levels. Each vault contains survival gear that should give you a fresh start on your new lives.

"The only consolation I can offer is that you are not alone. The scientists who volunteered for stasis may wake long before or long after you. If you have any desire to make contact with them, look for our secondary site in the hills of Kentucky, near the Tennessee border. Good luck to you all."

**Time-Vaults:** Five vaults set in the walls have been opened normally, while 12 have been forced from their hinges. The vaults were designed to provide an airtight seal for items stored within. One vault has not been opened; looters were unable to disable its locking mechanism. Opening the vault requires a DC 22 Strength check or a DC 15 Disable Device check. Because tools are unavailable, the Disable Device check suffers a -4 penalty.

The climate-controlled vault contains a survival kit to equip a single person with emergency gear. Inside it, PCs find:

- \*An AR-15 rifle (this weapon is identical to the military M-16, except it isn't capable of burst fire)
- \*2 100-round double snail drums, loaded
- \*2 smoke grenades
- \*1 small knife
- \*1 hatchet
- \*1 backpack (60 lb. capacity)
- \*3 sets of military surplus fatigues (sizes medium, large and extra large)
- \*3 pairs of boots
- \*1 first-aid kit
- \*1 compass
- \*1 pair of binoculars
- \*1 multipurpose tool
- \*2 gallons of distilled water in sealed jugs
- \*12 nonperishable rations
- \*1 gas mask
- \*1 rope (150 ft.)
- \*1 map with a handwritten note that reads, "You are here." The spot indicated is outside a town in Michigan, near the Ohio border. The map does not show a body of water within miles of the facility. The landscape has changed drastically since the map was drawn.
- \*1 inflatable raft (four-person capacity)

**The Island:** The cryogenics lab is on an island with a steeply sloped topography. Steep cliffs border the northern portion of the island, while the rest is covered with weeping willows and small citrus trees. Solar panels and windmills in surprisingly good condition considering their advanced age dot the area around the lab. Dense vegetation swallows outlying buildings and parking areas.

Water around the island is fresh and drinkable and filled with fish. South of the island, the lake turns to marshland. To the east, the remains of a highway overpass juts from the lake. Nothing is visible north and west except water.

**The Body:** A partially decomposed corpse lies on the island's south beach. The man's clothing is a mix of homespun cloth and tanned hide. The man's left leg is missing a massive chunk. A DC 12 Treat Injury check reveals a large animal bit him. A DC 15 Investigate check indicates he died from his wounds after crawling from the water's edge.

Future History and Secrets from the Past

Characters likely have a number of unanswered questions. Foremost is how they ended up in cryogenic stasis. They may also want to know about the five people who already awakened, the time-vaults full of survival gear and the disk. Finally, PCs are likely to wonder what happened to the world itself.

Getting to the bottom of this mystery is one of the campaign's central quests. Should the characters come across an intact library or other repository of information, they can piece together answers using a DC 15 Research check. Upon a successful check, characters gain access to the following:

Sometime around the second decade of the 21st century, the world experienced a massive energy shortage. Global oil reserves began to run dry, and competition for the remaining crude sparked military conflicts. Shortages of raw materials and energy resources strained the economy. Joblessness and lack of material goods created social turmoil, which stoked the fires of war. As industrial nations fought over resource-rich territory, domestic troubles worsened. Short but intense wars caused irreparable harm to the most powerful nations.

Violence and economic upheaval spread, but the worst was yet to come. While climate change had long been a problem, the early years of the 2030s saw the realization of this threat. Crushing droughts ravaged the American Midwest while merciless storms battered coastal regions around the world. Snow covered some areas while intense heat ravaged others. The human toll was severe, but it did not compare to the crop failures around the world. Starving and impoverished nations were the hardest hit. More than 1 billion people in Africa and Asia died of disease and malnourishment. Agricultural powerhouses could barely feed themselves. Warring nations pulled troops from the frontlines to deal with riots and civil strife. People fled to remote areas, hoping to escape fighting and rampant crime. Armed factions battled over every last weapon, tool or scrap of food. Industry slumped, so that eventually even ammunition became a precious resource. Few factories were capable of producing more material.

In the end, human civilization crumbled under our foolishness. The end of industrial society drove people into the wilds, while the changing climate allowed the wilderness to reclaim land humans once occupied. Over the centuries, the changes have peaked, altering climate zones and allowing for shifts in native ecologies.

### Jungle World overview

**The Endless Lake:** The Great Lakes flooded to form a single, massive freshwater body. The Endless Lake is a haven for blue-head 'gators and lake pirates who raid and scavenge from primitive sailing craft.

The ancient city of Cleave Land is inundated by flooding so only the tallest buildings remain above the waterline. These crumbling skyscrapers now house a boat culture that survives by trading with camps and villages along the shore. Boats transport passengers in exchange for barter.

**The Great Swamp:** Ohio is an enormous wetland entirely covered with marshes, glades and shallow lakes. Blue-heads don't venture far into the wetlands, as they prefer open water. The area is home to ordinary alligators and other swamp-dwelling creatures.

**The Woodlands:** Thick forests similar to those once found in the southern United States now cover Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania and southeastern Canada. Vast rainforests now cover Kentucky, Tennessee and points farther south, and stretch to the Gulf of Mexico.

**Abandoned Cities:** Abandoned cities no one has lived in for centuries can be found across North America. In these cities, moss and vines grow out of control, and layers of soil and loess cover streets and sidewalks. Weeds, grass and trees grow in every space.

**Camps:** Few and far between, small camps of human survivors still exist. Some camps are simple farming villages getting by with hand tools and 19th-century technology. Scrap-iron cities thrive, built near salvage sites and ancient waste dumps. Residents cling to long-lost technology and polluting industry. Some scrap-iron camps even have electricity and limited technical know-how.

Threats

**Blue-head 'gators:** The blue-heads are a species of alligator with bright-blue coloring on their heads that contrasts with their dark bodies. These large creatures evolved in the swamps and lakes of the North American rainforests.

Blue-head 'Gators

**Blue-head 'gators:** CR 4; Huge animal (aquatic); HD 6d8+30; hp 54; Mas 20; Init +0; Spd 20 ft., swim 30 ft.; Defense 15, touch 8, flat-footed 15 (-2 size, +0 Dex, +7 natural); BAB +4; Grap +20; Atk +12 melee (2d6+12, bite); FS 15 ft. by 15 ft.; Reach 10 ft.; AL none; SV Fort +10, Ref +5, Will +4; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 26, Dex 10, Con 20, Int 2, Wis 14, Cha 6.

**Skills:** Hide +4\*, Listen +5, Spot +5.

**Feats:** None.



**Improved Grab:** Blue-heads must hit an opponent of Huge size or smaller with its bite attack. If it gets a hold, the blue-head grabs the opponent with its mouth and drags it into deep water, attempting to pin it to the bottom.

**Skill Bonus:** Blue-head 'gators gain a +12 species bonus on Hide checks while submerged.

**Beasts:** The adventure is set in a subtropical zone that is home to a variety of non-native creatures. Some are descendants of escaped zoo animals, while others migrated here from Central America as climate zones shifted. Apes and monkeys, hippopotami, great cats and snakes populate this new rainforest. Also prevalent are thousands of species of vermin, from scorpions and spiders to mosquitoes the size of golf balls.

Wolves, deer, mountain lions and other species native to the region have been driven to cooler climates, though some adapted to the hot, wet environs and remain.

**The Ibu-Aja:** Tribes of primitive people called the Ibu-Aja live in the deepest reaches of the abandoned cities. No one knows from where this fierce and blood-thirsty warrior culture came. Their languages bear no resemblance to English or Spanish, and they possess only stone-age technology augmented by scavenged artifacts. They particularly treasure stainless-steel knife blades.

Some camp-dwellers believe the ibu are animals in human form, while others claim they are demons or mutations.

The truth is more shocking.

During the cataclysms of the 21st century, the crippling of the world's economy and infrastructure prevented shipments of agricultural products to urban areas. Major cities saw a mass exodus of their starving residents, who hoped to find food in rural communities. Left behind were legions of street children orphaned or abandoned during decades of war and strife. The Ibu-Aja are descendants of these homeless children.

Left to their own devices, these children struggled to survive, fighting wild dogs and each other for scraps of garbage. They eventually hunted dogs, cats and rats for meat. As the world of humans crumbled, the world of nature returned. The slow process by which the cities grew wild made life easier for the Ibu-Aja. The expanding green zones brought deer and other animals into the cities. As food became more abundant, the ibu population exploded. In the present age, the Ibu-Aja are no longer confined to the cities, but launch daring raids on distant camps. Some of the savage tribes follow game into the deep wilds, while others stay close to prime scavenging sites. A few Ibu-Aja learned to smelt scraps of copper and tin into bronze.

Ibu warriors scar their faces as a test of courage. They cut random chunks of hair from their heads and spike the rest with a mixture of blood and urine. The Ibu-Aja explored the arts of tattooing and piercing extensively. They wear little clothing except ornamental bands of leather decorated with beads, shells and feathers. Warriors and priests paint their bodies with elaborate designs and colors.

The Ibu may appear savage and brutal to outsiders. Among their own kind, however, the Ibu-Aja live relatively simple, peaceful lives. The Ibu have a simple world view. Anyone the Ibu encounter who is not from the same tribe is a potential enemy and is dealt with accordingly. It is a mistake to discount the viciousness and determination of Ibu warriors, who often partake in the ritualized cannibalism of their victims. Some chieftains create grisly monuments to their fighters, piling skulls and bones together or hanging body parts from poles.

Ibu-Aja religion revolves around sacred places where masked priests lead gathered Ibu warriors. Outsiders call these sites "gorilla shrines." Warriors start the ceremony by drinking and imbibing hallucinogenic substances. The warriors then test each other with wrestling matches and trials of strength before the priesthood whips them into a frenzy. These rites normally include chanting, acts of self-mutilation and animal sacrifice. Occasionally, the Ibu sacrifice human captives. The priests take turn brawling with this person, beating him bloody before tossing the sacrifice to the raging crowd to be ripped apart by bare hands and eaten.

A typical member of an Ibu-Aja tribe is a hunter, farmer or artisan. However, their harsh existence forces all Ibu to practice the arts of war. While they are not as deadly as full-fledged warriors, the typical Ibu-Aja is relentless and vicious when protecting his tribe, home and family.

The Ibu-Aja

**Typical Ibu-Aja (Strong Ordinary 1/Tough Ordinary 1):** CR 1; Medium-sized human; HD 1d8+2 plus 1d10+2; hp 14; Mas 15; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 15, touch 13, flat-footed 14 (+1 Dex, +2 class, +2 leather armor); BAB +1; Grap +3; Atk +4 melee (1d6+2 nonlethal, unarmed strike), or +3 melee (1d6+2, club); Full Atk +4 melee (1d6+2 nonlethal, unarmed strike), or +3 melee (1d6+2, club), or +2 ranged (1d8, bow); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL tribe; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +0; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 14, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 8.

**Occupation:** Rural (class skills: Handle Animal, Survival).

**Skills:** Climb +4, Handle Animal +4, Intimidate +3, Jump +4, Survival +4, Swim +6,

**Feats:** Armor Proficiency (light), Brawl, Simple Weapons Proficiency.

The warrior caste holds almost as much sway over the populace as Ibu priests. When not hunting, defending their territory or launching raids, warriors dedicate their time to training. Ibu prefer to fight using surprise and superior numbers, but they fight to the death if cornered. Warriors know enough about firearms to approach armed opponents using cover and stealth.

**Ibu Warrior (Strong Ordinary 3):** CR 2; Medium-sized human; HD 3d8+6; hp 20; Mas 18; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 15, touch 13, flat-footed 14 (+1 Dex, +2 class, +2 leather armor); BAB +3; Grap +5; Atk +5 melee (1d4+2, unarmed strike), or +5 melee (1d8+2, spear); Full Atk +5 melee (1d4+2, unarmed strike), or +5 melee (1d8+2, spear), or +4 ranged (1d8, bow); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL tribe; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +1; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 14, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 8.

**Occupation:** Athlete (class skills: Climb, Jump, Tumble)  
**Skills:** Climb +7, Handle Animal +3, Jump +7, Knowledge (tactics) +5, Swim +6, Tumble +5  
**Feats:** Archaic Weapons Proficiency, Armor Proficiency (light), Improved Damage Threshold, Simple Weapons Proficiency.

#### **Twists**

This adventure is meant to serve as the basis of a campaign, but GMs could build upon it by incorporating a few twists:

**Space Station:** Someone may have placed a space station into orbit before the world collapsed. These space pioneers survived by capturing and recycling satellites and other objects. Those trapped in orbit might find ways to communicate with those down below. They may even have a limited ability to travel in local space. Such an orbital colony would represent the most advanced technology left in the world.

**Time Machine:** For a sci-fi twist, the GM can give characters clues to the location of an ancient military facility housing a top-secret experiment involving time travel. If PCs locate this facility and get it operational, they might be able to return to their own times.

**Utopian Scientists:** In the hills of Kentucky, five 21st-century scientists struggle to rebuild civilization. If characters join them, they become involved in a desperate struggle to preserve their fledgling paradise.

**The Underground City:** Characters may come across a massive underground complex constructed by an eccentric billionaire to house himself and his most-trusted employees in the event of a global catastrophe. As the world suffered through war, economic collapse and environmental meltdown, people begged to enter the shelter-city. In the present age, the billionaire's descendants rule the city like a royal line. These despots are secure in their power only if they keep the city's residents from fleeing into the open spaces above.

#### **Author Bio**

David Caffee is a man with no felony convictions. He lives in Springfield, Ohio, where he works as a substitute teacher as well as a freelance writer. David enjoys spending time with his wife and two sons, as well as playing RPGs and generally goofing off. David Caffee holds a bachelor of arts in creative writing from Antioch University.



# Femme Fatale

by Travis Grundon

A lot of movies and stories depict the war between Heaven and Hell. The truth is most of them are so full of crap that they have lost all resemblance to fact. Most include a half-demon or some kind of superhuman as the lonely champion chosen to fight the good fight, risking everything to save mankind. As nice as that sounds, in real life, the only ones to fight this certain doom are the sorry bastards who get caught in the middle of it. Unfortunately, I happen to be one of those sorry bastards. My name is Jackson Reed. If I had any friends they'd call me Jack. As it is, I don't really like people. I have seen some pretty weird stuff and come toe to toe with even weirder stuff. Believe me when I tell you, intimacy gets tough when everyone you've ever gotten close to has either died or spat in your face, but I'm getting ahead of myself. People say the best place to start is at the beginning, so allow me to take you back in time just a little bit to 2001.

Twenty-one years old, I had just left Chicago, where I had managed to piss off the wrong people. I was passing through a one-horse town called Willow Springs, Missouri when I noticed the owner of the bar was understaffed and overworked. My mother was an alcoholic, so it only seemed natural that I could pull off tending bar. The owner got me a license and suddenly I was a bartender.

The real story begins on a cold November night about a week before Thanksgiving. I was getting ready to kick the last few drunks out of the bar and close up for the night when a guy bolted through the door like he was running for his life. He braced himself against the door and screamed for me to call the police. I stood there for a second or two, deciding if this guy was pulling my chain or if this was for real. Still not sure of anything I grabbed the baseball bat from behind the bar and tried to calm the young man down.

"Now just take it easy, hotshot. What the hell is going on?" He locked eyes with me. He was white as a ghost and raving like a madman. From the look in his wildly sprung eyes he was in a state of shock. His neck and chest were covered in blood.

"She's a monster! The crazy bitch bit me, and she's going to kill us all!"

Everyone in the bar not already freaking out began making their way toward the front door. I knew I had to do something or this lunatic was going to send everyone into a panic.

"Look, buddy, I'm sure you and your old lady will be able to work this out," I began.

"What the hell are you waiting for?!" screeched the crazy guy.

"Call the damn cops! She's going to be here any moment!"

I shoved the guy away, hard, using the bat for emphasis.

"Look pal, I've reached my nutcase limit for the day, so I'm calling the damn cops right now. Get a hold of yourself."

I wasn't sure if a small town like this had 911 but I sure as hell didn't know the W.S.P.D.'s phone number. I never had to call it before. I reached the police dispatcher just as the crazed stranger began to whimper and backpedal away from the door. I didn't

really know how to explain the situation to the smug woman on the phone as she asked me what my emergency was. I started to tell her about the psycho, but he started screaming again. I wondered, "What's he spazzing about now?" when I saw a red headed woman walking through the front door. This must have been his demon woman.

The woman couldn't have been more than 5'7" or 5'8" and, if I had to guess, she weighed maybe a buck-o-five soaking wet with a brick tied to her butt. She was wearing a KISS t-shirt and pair of blue jean shorts that had to have taken five guys to help her get them on. She looked good, good enough that I wondered if one guy would be enough to get them off. Then I noticed the strangest thing: Not only was she walking around in November without shoes on, but her mouth and chin were covered in blood, too.

"Holy hell!" I heard myself mutter.

The fiery-haired beauty stalked closer to the man on the floor, but once she heard me and saw the phone next to my ear she changed course and started to make her way over to me. She had a vacant stare in her eyes with an almost hypnotic glow. I could practically feel her looking right into my soul. Most of the time I like it when a pretty little thing looks at me, but I got the feeling this girl was not right somehow. I could hear the dispatcher on the phone and I wanted to tell her to send everything they had. I wanted to tell her to take this lady and her boyfriend out of my bar and as far away from me as possible, but as that woman looked at me I lost track of what the hell I was doing, where I was, even who I was. My eyes felt dry and sore watching the devilish woman walk toward me. I must have forgotten to blink. Damn it. I know I only closed my eyes for a second, but I swear when I opened them the woman had vanished. The bloody man on the floor made a beeline for the door followed by the remaining few patrons of the bar. The only guy that stayed was George, an older man who ran a pawnshop down the block. He just stood there pointing at me, or so I thought. As it turned out, the old bastard was pointing behind me. He was pointing at the woman but she looked different. Her face was all crazy-looking and her canines had grown into long pointed fangs, like something out of a horror movie.

She must have put on some kind of mask or Halloween costume and I'll admit I was taken off guard. I've never condoned hitting a woman, but without hesitation my right hand shot forward and blasted her in the face with the phone. It was then that I remembered the baseball bat. I didn't remember setting it down, but I must have because it was lying on the bar. I looked back to see how bad I had messed her up, but her eyes were on the bat. The next thing I knew, we were playing a game of tug-of-war over the bat that ended in her letting go. This of course sent me flailing backwards into the jukebox. My rear went through the glass, a few small pieces piercing me through my jeans. Now, while it may go without saying, by this point I'm pretty pissed off and I'm wondering where the hell the police are. I looked around the room to see the old man heading for the back door and the demonic dame perched on the bar like some kind of wild animal ready to pounce.

"Look sweetheart, I don't know what got your panties in a bunch, but I've had enough of this!"

Yep, I was wasting my breath. She just looked at me and hissed like a hellcat. I knew I was going to have to smack her down if the cops didn't get here soon. I just hoped that George was going to get some kind of help, not that I really needed any, but this bitch was a cheeseburger and fries short of a kid's meal. I could see her fangs as she sprang off the bar with her long, lethal looking fingernails angled toward my face. This marked the first time I've ever been terrified by a woman aside from my grandma or Janet Reno. This broad made them both look like Mother Teresa and she looked ready to rip me a new one. In retrospect, I'm sure I could have just jumped out of the way. Instead, I brought the bat up and swung it hard. I felt it snap as I blasted the bloodthirsty bimbo across the face, sending her spiraling to the floor. I hoped the girl was still alive, but I was also pretty sure I was going to jail.

The police had to have heard the chaos over the phone and should have already been there. I didn't know what I was going to tell them since bloody psycho guy had already high tailed it out of here. So it was going to be my word against the word of an unconscious, costumed freak.

It didn't look like the lady on the floor was breathing so I leaned down to see if she was still alive. Sure enough, she wasn't breathing. Now I was sure I was going to jail. Just then she reached out and grabbed a fistful of my shirt and some of the skin underneath. She sat up and jumped to her feet, lifting me with her. I couldn't believe my eyes. Not less than a minute ago she was on the floor dead. She revealed her fangs once more as she smiled.

"Well, good morning, sunshine," I said somewhat nervously. "What do you say we stop all this foolishness before the cops get here?" She tilted her head slightly to the right as her smile changed quickly to a cruel grimace.

I gave her a savvy smirk, but just my luck, she wasn't having any of it. Instead of succumbing to my wily charms, she leaned back and kicked me in the stomach. To be honest I don't think I'd ever been kicked so hard in my life. This jacked up jezebel was tough. Hell, I've fought grown men who didn't kick that hard. Her kick shot me backward to the floor as I tripped over my own feet. My head hit the bar and my back racked a stool that had fallen over. My broken bat landed in my lap.

"I'm going to suck you dry, meat sack!" she yelled, as she stared at my crumpled body there on the floor.

As temping as that sounded, I had to give the devil her due. She had me against the ropes and I was seeing little birdies. I was beginning to wonder if this chick was wearing a costume or if she really was chock full of some kind of demon. The fact remained that she had just punted me across the room like a yappy little dog, so I considered it my civic duty to take her down a peg or two, since Willow Springs finest seemed to have taken the day off.

I reached up and pulled my sad self to my feet. As I stood up, she knew it was go time. She was as strong as any NFL

linebacker and twice as mean. She charged me as I sprinted toward her. I pulled back what was left of the bat ready to take her head off, but as I swung she jumped into the air. I tried to follow her with my eyes but lost her as she cleared the top of my head. I started to turn as she grabbed me from behind by my hair and the back of my shirt. I pulled and struggled to break her hold on me. I figured if I could break loose, I'd have her right where I wanted her. She had other ideas, however. These ideas included picking me up and tossing me over the bar with one hand.

Let's just say her plan worked a little better than mine, and yours truly took a one-way flight over the bar into the bottles behind it. I heard the shrill clanking of glass as my left leg clipped several bottles of hard liquor and my back landed in a bunch of glasses I had just washed. I hit the floor in a shower of glass and alcohol. Not only had she trashed me and my bar, but she was wasting good alcohol as well. Now it was personal.

I righted myself under the bar and watched the mirror above where she had just flung me. I thought for sure I'd see her coming, jump up, and surprise her with a knuckle sandwich. So I waited and watched until I was convinced she must have left. As it turned out, I was wrong. I glanced up and saw her, perched on the bar again with that twisted, razorblade smile. Somehow I had missed her in the mirror. I did a double take, and still couldn't see her in the mirror. I looked again and, sure enough, this femme fatale had no reflection. Now I was totally freaked out. I couldn't remember what old monster movie talked about creatures with sharp teeth and no reflection, but I was pretty damn sure she was a vampire.

The problem was, I was never one for science fiction or fantasy. I was always one of those guys who like a good action flick, so since Bruce Willis had never had to fight a vampire I had no idea what the hell I was up against.

I tried to remember if I needed a silver bullet or a cross to fight the she-devil, but she wasn't waiting for anything. She yanked me out from behind the bar by my hair and dropped me hard on the floor. I quickly scrambled to my feet and started flogging her in the face with the broken handle of the baseball bat. It didn't really have any effect on her, but she took a few steps back giving me time to catch my breath.

"By God, it was a cross."

I was able to remember that it was a cross I needed to put this harlot out of my misery, but a bar is not the best place to find a cross, so it was on to plan B. It was all coming back to me now: vampires hate crosses, sunlight, and garlic -- hmm, not good. Assuming she was vampire, the playing field was in her favor. It was still four hours until sunrise and I was fresh out of crosses. There may have been garlic in the bar somewhere, but I'll be damned if I knew where. I briefly wondered if those little martini onions might have some effect, but I was going to have to make due, so I grabbed a broken stool leg and pressed it against the piece of the bat in my hand, forming a very makeshift cross.

"I'm sending you back to hell, fang face," I ranted as I took a few steps closer.



I could tell from the way she rolled her eyes and laughed that she was terrified of my holy ingenuity. She obviously knew I knew how to take a vampire out. The tension grew as we circled one another in the middle of the taproom. She tossed a few tables out of her way as our circle grew smaller and smaller. We were about four feet away from each other as she lunged forward with another vile hiss. She dug her fingernails into my shoulders as I pressed my ghetto tool-of-God against her face. The cross seemed only to keep her teeth away from my neck. While that was not the desired effect, I was still pretty happy with the outcome.

“Oh I get it, suck me dry...you’re going to suck my blood?” Boy did I feel stupid. Here all this time I thought she was just being dirty, but I guess this pretty little thing really wanted to kill me. Well, while I had to accept that my homemade cross was a failure, at least I knew it might be able to break her face if I hit her with it.

I waited until she reared back to bite again, planted my foot in her chest, and pushed as hard as I could. She only took a few steps back, but it gave me enough space to swing the two shards of wood at her head. Much to my satisfaction the weapons made a sickening thud on her temple and she fell down to one knee. Now I had her right where I wanted her. I moved in to take another shot at her face, but to my surprise she went right for my throat. She sprang at me and I fell back against the bar. I felt the broken piece of the bat slide into her flesh, grinding against her chest plate. She stumbled back a few paces and I realized I had accidentally impaled her with the bat. Her face told me that she was more than a little shocked. Then I remembered that a stake through the heart kills vampires, but then again, a stake through the heart pretty much kills anyone. The redhead’s face contorted in rage as she loosed an ear-shattering wail. She rushed forward, darkening to gray and exploding in a cloud of ash and dust.

Not that I thought anyone would ever believe anything that I had just been through, but no corpse meant no jail time for me. The killer vampire broad from who knows where was history. I stood covered in ash as the cloud diminished to reveal five heavyset, small town cops standing just inside the doorway of the bar. They looked like they’d just dropped a load in their pants, which told me they’d probably been standing there awhile. So why the hell hadn’t they bothered to give me hand? The cops didn’t arrest me. They didn’t know what to make of the whole situation once I gave them my story. I was sure they’d lock me away in some mental institution or even take me away to Area 51 or some other secret government location to keep me quiet. I guess they just assumed nobody would believe me anyway.

What happened in that bar was a long time ago. I still think about it from time to time because it set my mind to a new way of thinking. It was that day, that bar, and that blood guzzling that opened my eyes to a whole new world; and I’ve been fighting hell on earth ever since.

# INSTINCTIVE WANDERINGS

## Origins 2006

by Alisa Frisch

During the course of my busy summer in Alaska, I try to remain outside as much as possible during the short-lived season. However, this year I managed to break away from my regular gaming groups to catch a plane to Columbus, Ohio. There I joined 12,000+ visitors from all points of the states to experience the 2006 Origins gaming convention, which ran from June 29th to July 2nd. This wasn't my first visit, as I was fortunate enough to attend Origins in 2005. That initial impression blew me away with so much to do in such a short span of four days! I am pleased to say that the great experiences I had this year were parallel to last year's trip.

My husband, who has gamed for over 21 years, accompanied me on both trips. During our stroll through Columbus' multi-colored convention center it was clear we were going to have different experiences. He was eager for space, robots, and science fiction-themed games, while I wanted to check out the fantasy and horror games, not to mention the massive exhibitors' hall, which is the ultimate temptation for a gamer's wallet! I knew it would be a long and trying weekend.

The first day of gaming for me actually began one day prior to the official convention kick-off. I joined in an evening session of Werewolf: the Forsaken. I profess to be a five-year player of its predecessor Werewolf: the Apocalypse, so this game still digs a thorn in my side, since it's so vastly different from the game that fully threw me into the hobby. However, the session went well and packed some good planning and action despite its run time of under two hours.

As the official convention got underway, I looked forward to the classic mind game called *Illuminati*, created by Steve Jackson games. Unfortunately, this game became an example of a disappointment common to any large convention: it didn't happen. No other gamers showed up to play. So, along with an apology, I received Origins gaming tokens instead. These could be traded in for a refund of the game's entrance fee or used for another game. This currency system was a brilliant idea for the convention and alleviated a lot of headaches for those who went through the same experience.

My next venture took me into the fantasy realm of *Confrontation*. Originating from the French company Rackham, *Confrontation* is one of the first of the company's line of skirmish games and is rapidly growing in popularity. The exquisite details with which the Rackham artists paint the figurines instantly attracted me to the game.

This session was also an "open gaming" session, allowing me the freedom to wander around and play what I wanted. I finally settled on a demo game of Rackham's upcoming release,

*Cadwallon*, which uses a simple idea from back in the days of "dungeon crawling" games. You use figures from *Confrontation* and colored gaming tiles depicting different settings (usually interior rooms) to move around and accomplish an objective. I managed to best the Rackham representative I played against, earning myself a 10% discount on my Rackham purchase afterwards!

After much perusing of the convention's art gallery and exhibit hall, as well as peeks into the various themed rooms, I ended the evening with *Ironclaw*. This anthropomorphic-themed role-playing game lets you play a character on adventure in the land of Calabria. All the players had fun with this, even me as I stuck to the part of a thieving female squirrel! I also had the pleasant surprise of recognizing the game master, whom I met at last year's Origins during his introduction session of the *Ironclaw* game.

Then day two came for us. Ben and I actually hooked up to play a live-action game of *Frag*, where we were able to physically move ourselves around on a person-sized board maze. The game has you playing a soldier that moves around the maze to collect weapons and equipment, killing off anyone you find (hence the game's name). However, another problem surfaced that dampened this event for us. One player, a rude teenager with no respect for hygiene, was one of those people who would target one person and keep them out of the game, and I had the unfortunate "privilege." But this individual was probably one of many that were hanging around at Origins and worth avoiding at all costs, whether because of their bad habits, rules-mongering, or immaturity.

Luckily, my spirits lifted as Ben and I later caught a screening of the black and white silent movie *Call of Cthulhu*. Based upon the H.P. Lovecraft story, this excellent piece kept the audience thinking and chuckling (mainly due to the simple special effects) and showed that actions can definitely speak louder than words.

I followed up the show with another role-playing game, *Exalted*. This game just released its second edition, which many participants were trying out. The new rules seemed to flow more smoothly and the storyline didn't get overrun by heavy details. Teamwork really paid off for each of the players in this one, since we were all learning the new system and trying to remember items still active from the old system.

My Friday evening concluded with what I originally thought would be a modern-day *Call of Cthulhu* role-playing game. However, the game master surprised both me and the four other players (three of which were family) by taking us back into the Dark Ages to deal with Lovecraft's creatures. I played a leading role as a healer, struggling to keep his people alive after their town was stricken by a mysterious disease.

This was a gratifying game. It especially took some talent on the game master's part as he tried to tone down the mature theme of the game for the two teenaged brothers that played with us. It was also my big win for the convention, earning me a hardcover edition of H.P. Lovecraft's *Dreamlands* supplement for the *Call of Cthulhu* game.



As the weekend arrived, I entered the lighter side of board games and engaged in two Steve Jackson hits: *Tile Chess* and *Super Munchkin*. Both games take some strategy, sneakiness, and definitely plenty of smiles. I was glad to become one of the “kids” again, as it balanced out the sour experience I was to have later on in the convention.

That experience happened on Sunday, the final day of Origins. I managed to get into a special session of “play with the creator,” where you can actually play with the very person who designed the game you’re playing. I chose *Tunnels and Trolls* with Ken St. Andre. Ken was dressed in brown colors, an “Indiana Jones” type hat, and thick glasses. He started out as a welcoming and jovial game master, but the game soon took a one hundred eighty degree turn, at least for me.

I chose one of Ken’s pregenerated characters that happened to be at a lower skill level, thinking I could start off slow and work my way up the ranks with experience points. Unfortunately, the die rolls were against me, and my character died in the first combat. But the hardest part was that Ken cheerfully gamed on with the other players. It’s bad enough when, all of a sudden, a gamer is thrown into the spectator’s role at the gaming table, but even worse, Ken never gave me a chance to roll up another character. He just continued on, leaving me to become a blank spot at the table having to listen to everyone else’s adventure. So be forewarned: just because someone creates a game doesn’t necessarily mean they’ll be great at playing it.

All in all, after catching up on many hours of lost sleep and packing my three bags, one of them stuffed to the seams with purchases from the exhibit hall, I rate the Origins convention a 4 out of 5. Some minor problems like poor attendance and annoying players slightly dampened my experience, but Origins still made for a great gaming vacation thousands of miles from my home. Its size, diversity of events and visitors, coupled with the welcoming downtown Columbus district, make it a convention that is worthwhile for gamers of all levels to attend at least once in their lifetimes.

Next stop for me? Gen Con Southern California!

#### **Author’s biography:**

Alisa Frisch’s writing background expands over various media types, including newspapers, magazines, and online publications. She holds a B.A. in mass communications from Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. Her published works are found in *The Abyss*, *Fang*, *Claw*, and *Steel*, Bloomsburg University’s *Spectrum Magazine* and *The Voice* newspaper, *Times News* of Lehighton, Pennsylvania, and the online website “Wolverine and Rogue, which features X-men fan fiction. She has been writing for the *Silven Trumpeter* since 2005.

Born in Summit, New Jersey, Alisa has been gaming since 1998 and will do so for as long as she can. She also hopes to complete her first novel within the next few years. Both she and her gaming husband currently reside in Anchorage, Alaska, where they serve in the United States Air Force.



# spell bazaar

by Jeff Harkness

## Class Key

Asn = Assassin  
Clr = Cleric  
Drd = Druid  
Rgr = Ranger  
Sor = Sorcerer  
Wiz = Wizard



Welcome back to the Bazaar, my friend! I have done as promised and scoured this wondrous land for such miracles as your eyes have never seen! I shall soon let you peek at them and buy until your baskets are as full as a camel's hump – and your purse is barren as a mirage! I shall even share some of my adventures if you are so inclined, such as my journey up the Bleeding Tower of the Infinite. Why, the twisted marble stairs within that damnable structure were ...

Ah, but you are men of business, I see, and do not wish to tarry. Look here then, at my first wonder! I found it written in blood on the inside of a giant snapping turtle's shell, in the Lake of Broken Streams. That was a fight the bards should praise! I spent days deciphering the smeared text until I had recreated it perfectly. Fear not that I may have gotten something incorrect! I spent weeks on each letter, ensuring it was exact. You are my first customers of the day, so of course you should have the first chance to buy such a rarity. You did remember to bring your gold with you? Good, good, then let us begin our business with this interesting find ...

\*\*\*

**Fire marbles.** Create marbles of flame that explode when they hit a target.

Conjuration (creation) [Fire]

**Level:** Sor/Wiz 2, Fire 2, Drd 2

**Components:** V/S/M

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Range:** Personal (See text)

**Effect:** One marble/level

**Duration:** 1 round/3 levels

**Saving Throw:** Reflex negates (see text)

**Spell Resistance:** Yes

You create glowing marbles of flame that, when placed on the floor, can be directed toward targets within your line of sight.

One marble is created for each caster level (maximum of six marbles).

The caster can direct each marble separately, towards a single target or several. The marbles move at a speed of 30 feet per round, so long as they are actively directed. Otherwise they simply remain where they are. On entering a square containing a living target, the marble explodes in a burst of flame from ground level, doing 1d6 damage. A successful Reflex save avoids this damage entirely.

If you try to send a marble into a narrow opening, you must "hit" the opening with a ranged touch attack or the marble cracks and detonates prematurely. The marbles can also only move along relatively smooth, flat surfaces. Attempting to send a marble up stairs or through particularly uneven ground will break the marble and detonate it harmlessly.

The marbles can be directed for any distance so long as they remain within the caster's line of sight. At the end of the spell's duration, however, they detonate instantly wherever they are.

**Material component:** A cat's eye marble that is consumed in the casting.

\*\*\*

Not interested in children's games, eh? No marble playing for a fine, mature citizen such as yourself? No, you left such hobbies behind you long ago, I see. Then let us forget our misspent youth and revel in magnificent adventures! Now, this bit of parchment I found in a roc's nest amid the Hellshiver Peaks. How it got there, I've no idea, but many bones littered that infernal nest. Maybe you would be interested in the valuable treasures I left behind? I may be able to draw you a map if you've the gold and an interest in such a thing. But I'll warn you, the mother roc was a true monstrosity to behold! Her feathers were



as tall as a man, and dripped with the ichor of her victims! Ah, now I detect some interest in your eyes. We shall have to talk later of such deals, when I've had more time to think where I put that map to her frozen eyrie. But for now, let me direct your eyes to the wonder I pulled from that nest of death ...

\*\*\*

**Ash double.** Create a double out ash that can be used as a distraction.

Illusion (Shadow)

**Level:** Sor/Wiz 2, Fire 2, Asn 2, Trickery 2

**Components:** V/S/M

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Range:** Touch

**Target:** Being touched

**Duration:** 5 minutes/level

**Saving Throw:** Will negates (harmless)

**Spell Resistance:** Yes (harmless)

You use a large fire (such as a house fire, bonfire or forest fire, or even the remnants of a *fireball*) to create an ashen duplicate of a being. The target must walk through the fire (suffering no damage) after the spell is cast. When the creature emerges, a double created of ash follows. This duplicate mimics every visual outline of the being, although it maintains a deep gray coloration. If viewed from further than 100 feet away it appears to be the original being, but within 30 feet the nature of the double becomes obvious. Between those distances, an observer suffers a -8 penalty to their Spot check to notice the substitution.

The duplicate can perform simple actions (such as "run that way" or "climb"). The duplicate slowly crumbles as it moves, and finally explodes in a cloud of ash when the spell ends. The person duplicated can issue new commands to the ash double for the duration of the spell, but these commands must be spoken directly to the double. If left alone, the *ash double* performs the last command it was given until the spell ends.

**Material component:** A representation of the target (a doll, drawing, or other image), to be thrown into the chosen flame.

\*\*\*

Looks like, heh heh, today is a veritable fire sale! Fire sale? No, I had forgotten you are a humorless one. No more jokes. No more trifles. I will sell you something this day! How much gold do you have left after sampling the Bazaar's other thieving vendors, eh? Yes, you old woman! I know what you charge for a bolt of cloth! Flying carpets? Fah! You should be ashamed of yourself for stealing the precious coins from guests to our marvelous city! Your ragged carpets could not fly if they were thrown from the caliph's high tower!

But enough of her and her charlatan ways! Just keep hold of your gold, my friend, when she is about. You do have your gold with you, true? Well, then, I found this next item as I was ... resting ... in the palace of the sultan of al-Entaf after my epic battle with that damned river turtle. Have you tried turtle soup? The sultan loved it and it likely saved my life after my unfortunate dalliance with a harem girl! Maybe it will do the

same for you someday! I shall throw in the recipe with whatever you buy today! But here, feel this! The papyrus is still moist from my travails. Surely this will please your eye!

\*\*\*

**Spell Shelf.** Create a floating extradimensional space for storage. Conjunction (creation)

**Level:** Sor/Wiz 3

**Components:** V/S/M

**Casting Time:** 1 round

**Range:** Touch

**Target:** Dull Gray Ioun Stone

**Duration:** Permanent

You channel energy into a burned out ioun stone to create an extradimensional portal capable of storing small objects. The space created is 3-feet-tall by 1-foot-deep, and does not vary in size. Three shelves fill the interior of the space, which can be arranged or removed by the caster to accommodate larger items.

After the spell is cast upon it, the ioun stone orbits the caster's head as normal. The caster opens the shelf by stopping the ioun stone's motion and holding it before him.

If the ioun stone is placed within another extradimensional space, such as a *bag of holding* or *portable hole*, a rift to the Astral Plane is torn in the space: both items are sucked into the void and forever lost, together with their contents.

**Material component:** A dull gray ioun stone, which is not consumed in the casting.

\*\*\*

I see your eye wandering. Do my wares displease you so? The day has barely begun, and already I am a failure! Oh, my woeful life! If you could only but know the dangers I faced to bring these marvels before you! Then, surely would you be pulling open your pouches of gold and throwing your hard-earned coins at my feet. You do have gold, correct? Good! Here, then, look upon this next treasure. It comes to you from a hollow brick I found while chained in the slave dungeons of the demon mistress Bachnalle in the Blood Cyst Mines. I loosened my bonds and hid my person in a midden wagon pulled to the surface by a deformed giant! I barely escaped with my life! Surely that is worth your gold, eh? And if not, maybe the location of that gold-filled mine may interest you, eh?

\*\*\*

**Fog hut.** Create a semi-solid dwelling in a fog bank.

Conjunction (creation)

**Level:** Brd 3, Sor/Wiz 3, Drd 3

**Components:** V/S/M

**Casting Time:** 5 minutes

**Range:** Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

**Effect:** 20-ft.-square structure

**Duration:** 1 hours/level (D)

**Saving Throw:** None

**Spell Resistance:** No

You conjure a floating dwelling hidden within an already-

existing bank of fog or cloud. The floor is level, but spongy, and holes can be pushed easily through the walls and ceiling. The cottage floats a foot above the ground and moves according to the wind and the fog bank it is constructed within. The structure has a single door which can be closed, but no windows. The structure has no heating or cooling, and any fire or similar heat source within the structure causes the walls to unravel.

The fog hut makes its inhabitants Incorporeal for the duration of the spell, so that they may pass through trees and other obstacles as the *fog hut* floats along. Leaving the hut causes those within to return to normal. Spells can be cast normally within the hut, although destructive spells that pass through the walls to affect others outside cause the walls to unravel within 2d6 rounds. Any spell with a Fire subtype causes the walls to vanish quicker (1d4 rounds). Force effects cast at the hut (such as *magic missile* and *wall of force*) affect inhabitants normally. In the case of a *wall of force*, the *fog hut* continues on through the wall, while its inhabitants are shoved through the hut's wall as the dwelling moves on.

The cabin moves according to the wind, and can be affected by spells that disturb the fog bank. A gentle breeze causes the dwelling to waft along, while a spell such as *gust of wind* tears apart the walls and drops any inhabitants to the ground.

*Material component:* A wisp of smoke captured within a jar of sand and twigs.

\*\*\*

Surely, even you cannot pass up such a wondrous creation? No? No mists of the morning where you live? Then I shall save this for someone more in tune with the natural world. No, for you – and your gold – I must dig deep into my pouches and produce the truly spectacular. Things the eyes of man were not meant to see. Like this item. But ... no, perhaps I should not even show this item to the likes of you. No offense meant, of course, of course, but the item is a bit – how would you call it? – *malicious*. You still wish to see it? Then I shall oblige, but I shall take no responsibility for your well-being afterward. And even I sincerely hope such gentle buyers as yourselves would not be tempted by such depravity. I will sell it to you if you truly must have it, but I shall have to charge extra that I may donate to the church to atone for spreading such evil into the world. See the material it is written upon? Even I do not wish to know what manner of creature this came from.

\*\*\*

**Stone heart.** Cause a being's heart to solidify.

Necromancy [Evil]

**Level:** Clr 5, Sor/Wiz 3

**Components:** V/S/M

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Range:** Touch

**Target:** Creature touched

**Duration:** 1 round/level

**Saving Throw:** Fortitude half

**Spell Resistance:** Yes

You cause a creature's heart to harden as to stone, dealing 1d6 points of damage per caster level (maximum 8d6) on a successful touch attack. The creature suffers agonizing pain as its heart grows heavy and seizes up. In addition, each round until the spell's duration expires, the victim must make an additional Fortitude save or be restricted to taking only a partial action.

\*\*\*

Even though my purse remains empty, my heart soars that you are not the right customer for such a devilish creation. I truly am glad your eye is not attracted to such atrociousness. You don't know anyone who might be interested, do you? No? Good, my friend, good. Best not to associate with such deviants!

Let me turn your eyes to something that may cleanse them of such dark visions. This item I, ah, discovered in the elvish library of Lestifalt. It was scrawled upon a bookmark a previous visitor had left behind. I daresay the elven librarians didn't even know it was left within that volume! I saved further defacing of their property by taking the bookmark from that place forever. The elves should thank me!

\*\*\*

**Endless hall.** Cause a hallway to loop on itself to deter followers.

Conjuration (Teleportation)

**Level:** Sor/Wiz 5

**Components:** V/S

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Range:** Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

**Target:** 1 creature/level

**Duration:** 1 round/level

**Saving Throw:** Will negates

**Spell Resistance:** Yes

You cause a group of targets to become trapped as spaces bend round upon itself. Any being affected by the spell finds itself forever returning to the same spot, no matter what direction it should travel. Roads or hallways run on forever, yet lead nowhere but back to the start, while forest paths twist into an endless circle.

Spells and abilities that move a creature within a plane, such as *teleport* and *dimension door*, may be used to escape a particular area. However, so long as the spell's duration lasts, the victim will suffer the same effects wherever they emerge.

\*\*\*

Oh, the confusion such a spell might cause! I am glad I just sell these wonders rather than use them! I'll leave that to adventurers like yourselves! Still, I can see you are not interested in even this fine marvel. You are going to be my toughest customer: a discriminating buyer, reluctant to part with his hard-earned coin! Thus, I shall venture far and wide – and farther still! – to find something to win your eye. This I promise. In fact, I shall leave tonight! Let my brother come out of his wine stall and watch over my wares during my travels, for I must be on the road!

... continued on page 97



# Rattling Sabers

by Jeff Harkness

Six of them came over the low-stone wall, sabers ringing as they slid the weapons along the jagged rents in their bloody armor to coat the blades with their infected ichor. Pus-bloated features contorted hideously as they snarled their pain across the field. Their eyes were alive and alert, though, and filled with hate. Their hands – barely more than skeletal, flesh hanging loose from the bone – clenched painfully around the hilts of their weapons. Blood dripped from open wounds and sores, burning the grass where it fell.

“What in the hells are they?” Durkolt’s voice was low, far from the boisterous fighter who enjoyed charging enemies across the battlefield. Banek heard the edge of fear in his words. The warrior crouched awkwardly behind the rock wall, barely hidden. He wasn’t built for sneaking around. He was trying hard not to move, but Banek could see the pain his position was causing him.

The Nafar villager they’d hired to guide them across the island belly-crawled close to Banek. His voice was steady. No fear at all. “We call them saber wretches. Pox outcasts. Forced into the jungle when the black fly plague corrupts their souls. Their bodies refuse to give up the diseases, and they refuse to die. They wander in packs, infecting others.” He frowned. “If they don’t kill them first.”

Durkolt stiffened. The fighter prided himself on his body, his massive arms, his physical prowess in combat. A slow death wasting from disease scared him more than the greatest beasts of the land. Plague was a foe against which his sword was useless.

“Easy, Durkolt. We’re hidden. They aren’t looking for us.” Banek put his eye back to the hole he’d opened in the rock wall. The saber wretches moved slowly, ambling across the rocky field. With any luck, the five of them would pass without getting too close.

*Five?* Banek felt fear tighten around his chest. *Where’s the sixth?*

The guide gave a strangled cry as the saber point drove cleanly through his neck. He gurgled once, blood washing across the green grass, then the saber rose and dropped again. The wretch standing over him screamed as it stabbed down again, a high-pitched screech tailing off into a choking gurgle. Spitfle flecked with blood flew from the creature’s mouth, and Banek scrambled back. Grasses withered where the drops landed.

Durkolt came up with a scream of his own, his massive blade sweeping in a clean arc that took the wretch’s head off at the shoulders. It bounced away behind the wall. The rest of the

corpse dropped and pitched forward across the guide. Dark gore dripped down the once-white stones. Banek looked to the guide, face-down beneath the headless plague-carrier, knowing it was hopeless. The thief jolted backward in surprise. The wretch had nearly beheaded the guide, but where the saber had cut into the guide’s neck a black stain was spreading, withering the dead man’s skin as it progressed. In seconds, the wound gaped wider as the skin deteriorated and fell away in blackened flakes. Banek was sure it wouldn’t be long before the body was nothing more than a moldering pile of disease.

“Get up here, Banek, we’re going to be busy soon! They know where we are.” Durkolt was standing fast behind the wall, his eyes fixed on the approaching enemy. Banek saw him look down once at the guide, then take a quick side step away.

Banek stood aside, making sure he was well out of the way of Durkolt’s swing. The remaining saber wretches were moving fast, covering the ground between the walls in a loping run. Even as they ran they cut at their own flesh between the joints of their makeshift armor, coating the blades with more of their poison. Banek shuddered.

He had only to look at his feet to see the results. Disease dripped across the field as they ran. Plants withered in the wretches’ wake, dark stains marring nature. A choking laughter came from the misshapen figures as they closed. Ooze ran down their mangled faces.

“Do we run?” Durkolt looked ready to retreat, and Banek couldn’t blame him. The disease the creatures carried chilled his blood.

“We stand. I think these things are playing with us.” Banek looked behind them, at the jungle they’d so recently pushed their way out of. The trek had been arduous, and terribly slow going. If they ran back that way, the jungle itself would hold them until the wretches converged. No, the way out was straight ahead, plague or no plague.

The first saber wretch came on then, driving at Durkolt with its blade. A short sword, Banek noted, despite the name the guide had given. Durkolt parried, turning the blade aside. The move brought the wretch in close, and Durkolt punched the creature square in the face with his gauntleted fist, careful to avoid his skin touching the monstrosity. The wretch dropped to the ground at Durkolt’s feet, and the big warrior stepped heavily on its back. The thing’s spine snapped and it lay still. Banek moved close behind the warrior, keeping back to back.

The rest of the wretches swarmed them, scrabbling over the rock wall. Their touch left black smudges that bubbled on the stone.

Banek ducked a saber that whistled over his head, rolled to the left as another blade sliced into the ground he had crouched over. He came up swinging his own blade, catching the first attacker in the neck. But the blade caught on the jagged metal around a rent in its battered armour, turning the blow aside. A second creature took advantage, jabbing forward with a sure killing stroke.

The creature's arm landed in the grass as Durkolt's backswing caught it at the elbow, and it reeled back.

"You owe me one!" Durkolt shouted then turned back to his own foes. He punched another creature, then swung hard at the second. But he was hard pressed, the creatures keeping him off balance. Fear of the disease they carried was making him cautious, and overly so. Banek saw opportunities lost as the warrior dodged his plague-ridden foes.

Banek moved in again, slicing at the first wretch that still held its sword. The creature brought its blade up to block the thrust, locking weapons with the thief. Banek pushed backward, and the wretch fell over the remains of the guide. Its head cracked hard against the stone wall and it lay still. The thief watched the creature fall, turned to face the second wretch. It was disarmed – literally, thanks to Durkolt – but still dangerous.

It nearly took his face off with its gnashing teeth.

Banek dodged backward, falling into the jungle. Vines and leaves instantly wrapped around him, obscuring his view, showing him the shuffling feet of the saber wretch as it closed in. Banek swung his sword to try to free himself, but the jungle thwarted his every move.

He found himself trapped tighter in a constricting vine. But he could still hear the thing's gurgling laugh as it advanced on his prone form. He imagined its teeth sinking into his leg. Banek waited for the pain, wondered if he'd survive the plagues infesting the creature. Maybe Durkolt would survive and kill him before he killed others. He remembered the guide's putrefied corpse. If he survived ...

The wretch's head dropped at Banek's feet, decomposing even as he watched in horror. The body crumpled a moment later.

"Thought you said to stay out of the jungle."

Durkolt's tree-trunk legs appeared in view, and the warrior's iron grip yanked him free of the vines. A few refused to let go, but Durkolt pulled harder until they split. Several more reluctant creepers came free with Banek, still clinging to him. The thief sucked air back into his lungs. Behind Durkolt, the bodies of the two saber wretches he'd killed lay atop one another, already rotting into the grass.

Durkolt followed Banek's gaze. "I think we should go now."

A scream from beyond the wall caused them both to turn. Crossing the field between the two walls were more of the saber wretches, at least a score. Rheumy eyes watched the pair. Banek spotted a variety of weapons: maces, scythes, sabers and more. Every surface – armour, weapons and riven flesh – was covered with blood and bile.

Realization dawned on Banek. "We fought their scouts."

Durkolt nodded at the bodies piled around them. "We *killed* their scouts. Maybe we'll kill the rest of 'em."

Banek laughed as the horde of saber wretches loped across the field toward them. They'd barely held their own against a handful; this army would overwhelm them in minutes. Durkolt raised his sword, uncaring. They'd go down fighting.

The explosions blasted Banek and Durkolt off their feet, throwing them hard into the jungle again. A wave of heat washed over them, blistering turmoil that charred the grasses and set the diseased bodies of the dead saber wretches to smoking.

From the vines, Banek saw twin balls of fire ignite behind the stone wall. Smoke rose high into the sky and the flames roiled like a living thing. Banek imagined the saber wretches caught in the middle of the inferno, writhing as the flames seared infected flesh from their bones. Nothing could survive this torrent of fire.

As quickly as it began, it was over. A pall of black smoke hung in the sky above the field, wisps tearing away in the stirring breeze. A figure appeared from inside the smoke, deep purple robes twisting about her body. Her black hair was long, tied into a thick braid down her back. Pale skin glowed in the fires still burning on the ground. Sunlight and fire reflected off the silver rings, necklaces and bracelets she wore.

Banek clambered out of the jungle, vines made brittle by the heat breaking beneath his hands. Durkolt came out beside him, patting at his smoking tunic.

"What the hells was that?"

The figure in the air turned at Durkolt's voice, and Banek was sure more of the magical fire was about to rain down on them. At the last second, though, the woman's eyes widened and her hands dropped. She tilted her head toward them, and her body wafted through the streamers of smoke in their direction. Black tendrils swirled in her wake.

"I thought only the wretches were on the field this day." Her voice didn't match her appearance. It was harsh, full of hardships. "Who are you?"

Banek stepped forward. "Travelers. Our guide was slain by the wretches, and we barely escaped. You have our thanks..." He trailed off.

"Shaia." With a wave of her hands, she lowered herself to the ground. Behind her, the field was a smoking ruin, piled with the burning bodies of the wretches. Grasses smoldered, and even the rocks puddled in pools of slag. Banek told himself never to cross this young woman.

She followed his gaze. "Fire destroys such plagues. The birds and the beasts eat their carcasses otherwise, and the disease again finds its way into the villages." She nodded at the corpses still piled around them on this side of the wall. The stones had shielded them from the worst of her flames. "We'll need to set these afire also."

Durkolt nodded. "We shall, then we set off for the wizard."



There was no doubt the warrior wanted to leave this disease-ridden land as soon as possible.

Shaia turned. "Wizard? A horrid man? Eyes dead? Skin pallid?"

Banek caught Durkolt's glance. "Krallis. That's his name," the thief finally answered.

Shaia spat on the brown grass. "The wizard traveled through my village a month ago, riding on a cloud of black flies. Many fell ill in his wake, and the wretch disease took them. These were the last of my village." She waved behind her at the grim, charred field.

"I will show the wizard his death for this." Fire burned in the woman's eyes, rivaling that she had earlier cast.

Banek smiled. "Then let us move on. We can discuss the wizard's death as we travel."

And their quest continued.

### Saber Wretch

#### Medium Humanoid

**Hit Dice:** 5d8+20 (42 hp)

**Initiative:** +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

**Speed:** 30 ft. (6 squares)

**Armor Class:** 17 (+1 Dex, +6 banded mail), touch 11, flat-footed 16

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +3/+3

**Attack:** Saber +5 melee (1d6+2)

**Full Attack:** Saber +5 melee (1d6+2)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft./5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Disease

**Special Qualities:** Immunities, Putrefaction

**Saves:** Fort +8, Ref +2, Will +4

**Abilities:** Str 14, Dex 13, Con 18, Int 12, Wis 11, Cha 6

**Skills:** Climb +4, Jump +3, Listen +4, Spot +4

**Feats:** Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes

**Environment:** Temperate plains

**Organization:** Solitary or Horde (2-30)

**Challenge Rating:** 4

**Treasure:** Normal

**Alignment:** Always Evil

**Advancement:** By character class

**Level Adjustment:** +1

*A closer look at this warrior's face and body reveal the diseases that ravage his frame. Ooze drips from open sores on his face, and his filthy banded armor actually cuts into his torso. The saber he carries is coated with a vile bubbling ichor. His eyes stare angrily from the destruction that was his face.*

Saber wretches are said to be the remains of a marauding horde. The army – which fought exclusively with sabers, which lent the creatures their final name – was destroyed years ago. Whether the current saber wretches are the forsaken men of that ill-fated army or merely their descendants is unclear. But the saber wretches often travel together in military precision, sacking small villages and adding to their "recruits." While the diseases

the saber wretches wallow in are fatal to most, a rare handful survive the plagues and are allowed to join the small group as it moves onward to the next village.

### Combat

Saber wretches attack with whatever weapons they carry. While the name saber wretch comes from ancient days, saber wretches have been seen wielding weapons such as maces, a variety of swords, and even scythes. But whatever the weapon, the wretches coat the instrument with their blood and skin to infect whomever they attack.

**Disease (Ex):** A saber wretch's blood and skin contain a virulent disease. Anyone struck by a saber wretch or a blade coated with the creature's ichor may contract a virulent form of slimy doom. **Slimy doom:** injury 14; incubation 1 day; damage 1d6 temporary Con and victim must succeed at another saving throw or 1 point of temporary damage is permanently drained instead.

**Putrefaction (Ex):** A being slain by a saber wretch starts decomposing rapidly, until nothing except a putrid mound of disease remains after 2d6 minutes. A *remove disease* spell cast upon the corpse halts the putrefaction and kills the microorganisms causing the advanced corruption.

**Immunities (Ex):** Saber wretches are immune to disease and poison.

### About the Author

Jeff Harkness has written or edited more than a dozen D&D adventures or sourcebooks, including *Burok Torn: City Under Siege* and *Creature Collection Revised* for White Wolf, and *Glades of Death*, *Eldritch Sorcery* and the upcoming *Splinters of Faith* for Necromancer Games.

### Continued from page 94

But come back again when I return, my friends, and see what my travels have wrought. And remember: The Bazaar never closes!

\* \* \*

Key: Asn = Assassin; Clr = Cleric; Drd = Druid; Rgr = Ranger; Sor = Sorcerer; Wiz = Wizard

#### Production Note:

The three asterisks (\* \* \*) in the text should be a thin dividing line to set the spells off, but that don't interrupt the flow of the tale too badly. It should be clear that the text continues after each spell as it is introduced.

## Through the Lens of History: Using History for Better Gaming Volume II, Vision Number I: Beer and Brewing throughout the Ages

by Sean Holland

*“Beer and Bread.”*

-Ancient Egyptian Greeting

The brewing of alcoholic drinks is one of humanity's oldest crafts. It paralleled the development of civilization and may have contributed to the gathering of nomadic peoples into larger, more permanent groups – the first villages. The beer-brewing process is a relatively simple one, possibly discovered by accident when cereals underwent spontaneous fermentation, and this simplicity has granted the drink an enduring popularity.

### Part I - The History

The history of brewing is almost the history of civilization. The earliest recorded reference to brewing is in a Mesopotamian pictogram from circa 4,000 B.C.E., while the first written comment on the matter came some six hundred years later. It is likely that brewing predates both of these by a considerable margin, perhaps reaching back as far as 10,000 B.C.E. when humankind first began harvesting grains as farmers.

And wherever there is grain, there is beer. From Meso-America to Europe, Africa to Asia, beer was and is brewed from native grains. Some modern anthropologists even suggest that it was the desire for beer that led to the cultivation of grains and thus civilization. In the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the wild man Enkidu is partly brought into civilization by being shown how to eat bread and drink beer. The basic day's wage in Mesopotamia was expressed as bread and beer for a day, making it part of the staple of life.

Beer was also used medicinally, mixed with herbs and drunk or even mixed with into a paste and spread as a poultice. The development of beer seems to have quickly emerged as an important social and medical factor. The boiling process during brewing, when combined with the alcohol in beer, helped to overcome the lack of sanitation and access to clean water in the pre-modern world by killing microbes and other dangerous things within the beverage. This is why children would drink small beer, a weak brew just barely alcoholic.

With time, beer became an important social drink. Sharing a drink is a universal ritual of friendship: by drinking first, the host can show the drink is safe and good, and welcome the guest by this sign of trust. Offering small beer to an adult was considered an insult. Beer was also often incorporated into religious ceremonies. Many cultures saw beer as a gift from the gods, so it only made sense to give it back to the divine. Beer was used as sacrifice, in fertility ceremonies and as gifts to the gods, spirits and the dead.

The process of brewing begins with mashing, where the malted grains are crushed and soaked in warm water. The mash is then held at constant temperature to convert starch into fermentable sugars. Water is poured through the mash to dissolve the sugars, and this creates a sugar-rich liquid called the wort. The wort is then boiled along with any remaining ingredients to remove excess water and, in later years, hops would be added at this stage. Lastly, yeast is added and the beer is left to ferment.

Early beer came in many forms: the ancient Egyptian beer was practically fermented porridge. Mesopotamian beer was drunk through straws to avoid the grain chaff that floated on the top of the surface. Each culture developed multiple styles of beer: light, dark, strong, weak, rich and poor. Skilled brewers were always in demand, often taking their own “mash tubs” (pots used to mix the grain for brewing) with them. While expert brewers were prized, almost every adult knew the basics of brewing and most households would brew beer for their own use.

Beers can be made from all sorts of grains, usually barley, but rice, rye and wheat are also commonly used. Hops, which act as a flavoring and a preservative, are a recent addition to beer first documented in eleventh-century Germany and spread to England by the sixteenth. The addition of hops made for easier transportation of beer, as it kept longer. Before the widespread use of hops, a mixture of flavored herbs known as gruit or grut was often added to beer. The particular blend of herbs used in gruit varied from region to region and from brewer to brewer, and some of the herbs used had limited preservative properties.

### Part II- Breaking it apart and putting it back together

Most characters will grow up in societies where beer drinking is the norm, regardless of the time-period. Beer consumption is simply a fact of life. That does not mean that every character will like beer; some may be repulsed by it. Others may be amateur brewers in their spare time. But beer is omnipresent in most pre-industrial cultures, and provides a wide variety of plot-hooks and ideas to incorporate into your character's background. Perhaps one of the characters is questing for the perfect mug or nut brown ale or the lost secret of her family's recipe for gruit.

The secrets of brewing, such as proper roasting times and methods and the right blend of herbs to make up a gruit, were jealously guarded by their owners. The most successful brewers did not want others to use their best recipes and steal their customers and livelihood. Characters could be hired to protect – or steal – a particularly famous recipe.

A master brewer could be summoned to serve a rich merchant, noble or even a royal household. Such a suddenly important man would require an escort to bring him and his equipment to his new employer. Equally, there could be rivals who do not wish to see the brewer arrive in a timely fashion . . . or possibly at all.

The characters could be sent on a mission to retrieve a certain type of beer. For example, it is known that the visiting ambassador is fond of a beer only brewed in a little town high in the mountains and it has to be brought back as soon as possible.



A favorite inn, bereft of beer through ill fortune or sabotage, is likely to fail. Perhaps the characters can be convinced to acquire and transport a new supply to save the inn?

Beer is likely to be primarily a background element to a world, but at times, it can assume a greater importance and there is never any harm in having the character knocking back a mug of the local favorite at the inn.

### Supplemental d20 Material

#### New Feat

Master Brewer [General]

You are recognized as among the best brewers, your skill in beer making is unrivaled and known near and far.

**Prerequisites:** Craft (brewing) 6 ranks, Skill Focus (Craft [brewing]).

**Benefit:** You receive a +2 bonus on Craft (brewing) checks and your beers and ales can command a 20% premium on price. Among those who are aware of your reputation, you gain a +2 bonus to Diplomacy and you gain a +2 bonus on Appraise checks when appraising ales and beers. Lastly, you gain a +1 bonus to saves against ingested poisons.

# The Silven

## Bestiary

### Beasts of Legend

Kyle Thompson

Get lost underground! This issue's monsters are all of subterranean origin. From giant worms that suck the strength right out of you to wolves altered by magical experimentation: you'll find four new monsters in this issue's Silven Bestiary! Beware! Keep one eye on the floor and the other on the ceiling when you're traveling underground with these beasts.

#### Grassk

**Gargantuan Plant**

**Hit Dice:** 15d8+105 (172 hp)

**Initiative:** +0

**Speed:** 0 (stationary)

**Armor Class:** 21 (-4 size, +15 natural), touch 6, flat-footed 21

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +11/+31

**Attacks:** None

**Full Attack:** None

**Space/Reach:** 20 ft./50 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Net, spores, swallow whole

**Special Qualities:** Regeneration 15, stationary, tremorsense

**Saves:** Fort +16, Ref -, Will +4

**Abilities:** Str 26, Dex 10, Con 25, Int 7, Wis 9, Cha 8

**Skills:** Hide\* +15

**Feats:** None

**Environment:** Any underground

**Organization:** Solitary

**Challenge Rating:** 13

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Always neutral

**Advancement:** 16-20 HD (Gargantuan), 21-25 HD (Colossal)

**Level Adjustment:** -

*You suddenly have a bad feeling about the room you just entered. Nothing seems to be out of place, yet the blank walls of the cave stare back at you. Suddenly, you feel a tiny tingling across the back of your neck, making your hair stand on end. You look up in an attempt to find the source and you spot a large, gray, bulbous mass dangling what looks like moss upon you.*

Grassk are subterranean plants that hang from cavern ceilings and have a carnivorous diet. They tend to feed on subterranean mammals and reptiles that unknowingly travel beneath the plant, only to be paralyzed by its spores and snatched up into the gaping maw of the plant. The plants cannot move from where their main mass is rooted and once they take root, they stay in a confined area. Grassk tend to die early if they do not have enough room to spread out and attach their mossy nets to the ceiling.

Grassk are composed of two main parts. First, they have a bulbous head that resembles a giant closed flower that matches the colors of its surroundings. This is firmly rooted to the ceiling

and cannot move except to open and close to intake food. When the head opens to intake prey, it reveals several sharp tooth-like thorns covering the inside of the plant. Food stays here until it is digested. The head of a grassk is about fifteen feet in diameter. The second part of the grassk is its moss-like appendages, often mistaken as roots, which keep the giant head attached to the ceiling. These are actually sticky appendages that are used to capture prey and haul it back up to the head of the plant to be eaten. A grassk spreads these tiny, but strong appendages around itself very thickly, to make it appear as if it had little or no reach.

Grassk always mimic the color of their surroundings. They have organic chemicals within them that allow them to change colors and surprise their prey. Many learned sages estimate that a grassk can go about one month without eating before it starts to die. Grassk need little water or sunlight.

#### COMBAT

In general, a grassk will release its spores when they will affect the most enemies. Then, it snatches victims up with its mossy, net-like appendages and swallows them.

**Net (Ex):** A grassk's main body is surrounded by moss-like appendages that it will drop down onto its prey. This is a ranged touch attack that does not provoke an attack of opportunity, and the grassk can reach anything that is within 50 feet below the main body. These mossy appendages are very sticky, making escape difficult. When capturing prey, the appendages literally drape down and scoop it up, forming a net. If a grassk successfully hits a target with its mossy appendages, the target is considered to be entangled, taking a -2 penalty to attack rolls and a -4 penalty to effective Dexterity. Entangled creatures can only move half speed and creatures that fly using wings cannot do so until they escape.

The same round that a grassk captures prey, it begins to haul the creature up towards its head. This makes it so that walking creatures cannot walk any longer. The second round after the target is captured, it is halfway to the head of the grassk and on the third round, the grassk forces the target into its mouth (see Swallow Whole).

To cast a spell, any creature within a grassk's appendages must succeed at a Concentration check (DC 15) or the spell cannot be cast. If the spell has somatic component, the check DC increases to 20.

If a creature is attempting to escape a grassk's appendages, they must succeed at an Escape Artist check (DC 23). A creature can break free from the grassk's appendages as well, but the mossy appendages are as strong as rope. The net a grassk forms to capture a creature has 5 hit points and can be burst with a successful Strength check (DC 25). The previous two actions are both full-round actions.

**Regeneration (Su):** Only fire and acid deal lethal damage to a grassk.

If the grassk's appendages are damaged by anything other than fire or acid, they repair themselves in 1d6 rounds.



**Spores (Ex):** Every 1d6 rounds, a grassk can emit spores. These spores reach the ground 1d4 rounds after the grassk releases them and take up an area in the shape of a sphere with a diameter of 10 feet. The spores generally land right under the grassk's head. The spores then remain stationary for 1d6 rounds. Any living being in the area must make a Fortitude save (DC 24) or become paralyzed for 1d6 rounds. The save DC is Constitution based.

A cloud of spores can be dissipated by any form of wind that blows at more than 5 miles per hour.

**Stationary:** A grassk cannot move its main body except to open to feed. It automatically fails all Reflex saves.

**Swallow Whole:** Once the grassk has a creature stuck in its appendages, it can attempt to swallow that creature with a successful grapple check. The creature must be Large or smaller. If the grassk succeeds, the creature is swallowed and is now inside the head of the grassk. Once inside the grassk, a creature takes 2d8+5 crushing damage, 1d6+5 piercing damage (from the thorns that line the inside of the grassk) and 1d8 points of acid damage (from the digestive fluids inside the grassk).

A swallowed creature can escape in one of two ways. When the grassk opens its mouth to swallow another creature, any other creatures already inside that are still alive and conscious may automatically attempt a grapple check. If the creature succeeds it escapes. A swallowed creature may make a Strength check against the grassk to force open the grassk's mouth, allowing it to leap out. As soon as the creature holding the mouth open leaves the mouth, it snaps shut, leaving any remaining swallowed creatures stuck inside to find their own way out. If a swallowed creature is trying to hold the grassk's mouth open for more than one round, an opposed Strength check must be made every round or the mouth will snap shut again. Any creatures that escape the mouth of the grassk that cannot fly take falling damage for the distance that the grassk is from the floor.

A grassk's interior can hold two Large or Medium, four Small, eight Tiny, sixteen Diminutive or thirty-two Fine or smaller opponents.

**Tremorsense (Ex):** Grassk can automatically sense the location and effectively attack anything within 90 feet of them due to small hairs that cover the whole of the plant.

\*Grassk have a +27 natural bonus to their Hide checks due to their ability to blend with their surroundings.

## Kurtzival

**Medium Aberration**

**Hit Dice:** 7d10 + 24 (62 hp)

**Initiative:** -1

**Speed:** 20 feet

**Armor Class:** 26 (-1 Dex, +17 natural), touch 9, flat-footed 26

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +5/+5

**Attacks:** Slam +5 melee (1d4 plus strength conversion)

**Full Attack:** Slam +5 melee (1d4 plus strength conversion)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft./5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Strength conversion

**Special Qualities:** Tremorsense

**Saves:** Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +4

**Abilities:** Str 10, Dex 8, Con 17, Int 12, Wis 9, Cha 4

**Skills:** Climb +10, Hide +11, Move Silently +11

**Feats:** Great Fortitude, Stealthy, Toughness

**Environment:** Any underground

**Organization:** Solitary, pair, or colony (3-20)

**Challenge Rating:** 5

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Always neutral

**Advancement:** 8-12 HD (Medium)

**Level Adjustment:** -

*The cavern seems bare at first, but suddenly, a long worm-like creature works its way into the dim torch light and you watch as it shuffles its way across the floor towards you. The creature is revolting, being a mottled gray color and slick with moisture.*

Kurtzivals are strange worms that inhabit caves and other subterranean formations. They look like exceptionally large earthworms and are dull gray in color. The creatures shine in the light as moisture tends to condense on their flesh.

Kurtzivals are generally about five feet in length and six inches in diameter. They are not exceptionally strong or agile, but they are an intelligent creature and tend to form a semblance of structured societies in the caves they inhabit. Most of the time, kurtzivals will cooperate in order to bring down a larger creature and suck out whatever strength it has left so that the whole colony can survive. Also, kurtzivals are never seen in caves and tunnels that are rarely traveled. They are always near well-traveled areas and will relocate if prey becomes scarce.

Kurtzivals 'speak' their own language of strange up and down movements that resemble tapping out a code. They can convey most simple ideas and several complex ones with this code.

## COMBAT

Kurtzivals only strike at the opportune moment, waiting for the best time to sneak up on an opponent and sap their strength. Most often, kurtzivals are found in groups and use this to their advantage, focusing on one target to bring it down.

**Strength Conversion (Su):** Any time a kurtzival successfully strikes a target, the target immediately takes 1d6 temporary Strength damage unless they succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 16). If the target fails the save, the kurtzival that struck it gains a natural armor bonus equal to the Strength that the target lost in the attack. The save DC is Constitution based.

**Tremorsense (Ex):** A kurtzival can automatically sense the location and attack anything within 60 feet of it as long as it is touching the ground.

## Luthamar

**Medium Monstrous Humanoid**

**Hit Dice:** 8d8 + 16 (52 hp)

**Initiative:** +1 (Dex)

**Speed:** 30

**Armor Class:** 15 (+2 Dex, +3 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 13  
**Base Attack/Grapple:** +8/+11  
**Attacks:** 3 handaxes +6/+6/+6 melee (1d6+3/x3)  
**Full Attack:** 6 handaxes +6/+6/+6/+6/+6/+6 melee (1d6+3/x3)  
**Space/Reach:** 5 ft./5 ft.  
**Special Attacks:** None  
**Special Qualities:** Darkvision 60 ft.  
**Saves:** Fort +4, Ref +8, Will +6  
**Abilities:** Str 16, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 7  
**Skills:** Hide +13, Move Silently +2, Spot +0, Listen +0  
**Feats:** Martial Weapon Proficiency, Multiattack, Multiweapon Fighting  
**Environment:** Any underground  
**Organization:** Solitary, pair, group (3-10), or tribe (11-100 and 1 level 5 Barbarian leader)  
**Challenge Rating:** 6  
**Treasure:** Standard  
**Alignment:** Any  
**Advancement:** By character class  
**Level Adjustment:** +8

*A hairless creature comes running out of the tunnel on the other side of the room. The tall, grey thing has six arms, each wielding a handaxe. The emaciated being halts as it nears you and lets out a ferocious roar, and then comes charging at you.*

Luthamar are simplistic beings that inhabit deep caverns and tunnels. They often find large natural rooms and form a community in such places. They almost never come to the surface.

Luthamar are generally about eight feet tall. They are hairless creatures with extremely tough, grey hides. Luthamar's faces are long and skinny, looking vaguely like a stretched human face. They have six arms and two humanoid legs. Usually, luthamar wear simple clothing made from hides of subterranean beasts that they hunt when they are not fighting off other dangers of the underground.

Select luthamar males and females are trained by their elders to become what they call *uxchalar*, elite tribal warriors (use the Barbarian class). Upon the completion of their training, new young *uxchalar* are sent to travel throughout the caves and learn what they can about their spiritual selves. They worship their own god of war known as *Ifdrax*. When an *uxchalar* returns from their spiritual journey, they are to fight the tribe's chieftain until first blood is drawn. If the returning *uxchalar* wins, they become chieftain and the older chieftain becomes an advisor and guard to the new chieftain. If the returning *uxchalar* loses, they remain at their current status and fight for their tribe and their chieftain.

Luthamar speak a variation of Undercommon.

## COMBAT

Luthamar use simple tactics. They often charge into battle and fight to the death. If an enemy is exceptionally strong, they will gang up on that enemy and try to kill it quickly.

## Spider Wolf

### Medium Magical Beast

**Hit Dice:** 6d10 + 6 (39 hp)

**Initiative:** +3 (Dex)

**Speed:** 60 ft.

**Armor Class:** 17 (+3 Dex, +4 natural), touch 13, flat-footed 14

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +6/+7

**Attacks:** Bite +7 melee (1d6+2 plus poison) or 2 claws +5 melee (1d6+1)

**Full Attack:** Bite +7 melee (1d6+2 plus poison) and 2 claws +5 melee (1d6+1)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft./5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Poison, trip, web

**Special Qualities:** Darkvision 60 ft.

**Saves:** Fort +6, Ref +8, Will +1

**Abilities:** Str 14, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 4, Wis 8, Cha 5

**Skills:** Hide +3, Listen +2, Move Silently +12, Spot +2

**Feats:** Alertness, Multiattack

**Environment:** Any underground

**Organization:** Solitary, pair, or pack (3-10)

**Challenge Rating:** 5

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Always neutral

**Advancement:** 7-15 HD (Medium)

**Level Adjustment:** -

*A wolf-like creature with black fur approaches, snarling at you from the edge of your torchlight. As it moves closer, you can also see that the creature has eight legs. Suddenly, the creature howls, sending shivers up your spine. Once you recover, you notice two more of the creatures have arrived...*

Spider wolves were created when a deranged mage attempted to fuse a tarantula and a wolf together. The project was a success in some respect because obviously, the mage created something; however, the newly spawned creatures proved to be extremely violent: they killed the mage and escaped from his underground laboratory. Infestations of these creatures can be found throughout any caves and tunnels. Occasionally, they will interfere with a dwarven mining operation, causing the dwarves to hunt and eradicate the spider wolves in their egg-laden nests.

Spider wolves look almost like a regular wolf with black hair, except for the fact that they have eight legs and a spinneret under their tail.

## COMBAT

Usually, spider wolves use group tactics. Some of them will try to keep prey busy by spraying it with their webs. Others will move in, making quick bites in an attempt to poison their enemy or trying to trip them up.

**Poison (Ex):** Bite, Fortitude save (DC 14); initial and secondary damage 1d6 strength.

**Trip (Ex):** A spider wolf that hits with a bite attack can attempt to trip the opponent as a free action without making a touch attack or provoking an attack of opportunity. If the attempt fails, the opponent cannot react to trip the spider wolf.

**Web (Ex):** A spider wolf's web is not used like other spider webs (as part of their home). The spider wolf instead only uses the web to capture prey. A spider wolf can use its web out to a range of ten feet. The spider wolf makes a ranged touch attack taking a -2 penalty since it must face away from its opponent to hit it with the web. If the ranged touch attack succeeds, that same round, the webbed creature may not move and flying creatures tumble to the ground, but the victim may still attack anything in range of their weapons or natural attacks (excluding attacks that require the use of the feet/wings).

The round after a creature has been hit with a web, a spider wolf may make a second ranged touch attack with a -2 penalty to stop the creature from attacking.

If a creature is bigger or smaller than Medium-sized, the entrapment time and ranged touch attacks will vary. For every size category larger than Medium, it takes the spider wolf twice as many rounds and ranged touch attacks in a row for the spider wolf to successfully prevent it from moving and attacking. For example, a large creature would not be able to move after being hit with two consecutive, successful ranged touch attacks. It would take two more rounds and two more consecutive, successful ranged touch attacks to stop that same large creature from attacking. Creatures smaller than Medium-size cannot attack or move if they are hit with a spider wolf's web.

A creature can escape from a spider wolf's web with a successful Escape Artist check (DC 20) or it can be broken with a Strength check (DC 32). A spider wolf's web has 12 hit points.

### **Bonus Material: New Spell**

#### **Touch of the Kurtzival**

Transmutation

**Level:** Sor/Wiz 5

**Components:** V, S, M

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Range:** Touch

**Target:** Creature touched and you

**Duration:** 10 minutes/level

**Saving Throw:** Fortitude Negates

**Spell Resistance:** Yes

When you cast this spell, you make a melee touch attack against a target. If successful, the target creature takes 1d6 temporary Strength damage. This is healed automatically at the end of the duration of the spell (unless the creature dies). If the spell is successful, you gain a natural armor bonus equal to the Strength that the creature touched lost for the rest of the duration of the spell. This does stack with multiple uses of this spell, with other spells and with magic items that grant natural armor bonuses.

Material Component: A pinch of worm dust.



# Reviews

**Where we tell you what to buy and what to run from....**

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**PoxNora from Octopi**  
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## How we rate

### Scoring definitions for d20 products:

- 18 = Superior. *Best of the best.*
- 16 = Very Good. *Part of a Baker's Dozen.*
- 14 = Good. *Most gamers would like this.*
- 12 = Fair. *Some gamers would like this.*
- 10 = Average. *Most gamers would be indifferent.*
- 8 = Sub-par. *Flawed, but not without promise.*
- 6 = Bad. *Most gamers would dislike this.*
- 4 = Very Bad. *Among the Dirty Dozen.*
- 2 = Inferior. *Worst of the worst.*

### Scoring Definitions for non-d20 products:

- 12 = Superior. *Best of the best.*
- 11 = Excellent. *Just a hair from perfect.*
- 10 = Very Good. *Part of a Baker's Dozen.*
- 9 = Good. *Most gamers would like this.*
- 8 = Fair. *Some gamers would like this.*
- 7 = Average. *Most gamers would be indifferent.*
- 6 = Sub-par. *Flawed, but not without promise.*
- 5 = Poor. *Some gamers would dislike this.*
- 4 = Bad. *Most gamers would dislike this.*
- 3 = Very Bad. *Among the Dirty Dozen.*
- 2 = Inferior. *Worst of the worst.*

# Eve: Second Genesis CCG

by Nash J. DeVita

**Developers:** Pétur Örn <th>órarinnsson, Reynir Har<d>arson & Stefán Fri<d>riksson, with contributions from Rúnar <th>ór <th>órarinnsson and Hrafnkell Smári Óskarsson.

**Publisher:** CCP Games

**URL:** <http://www.ccpgames.com>  
<http://www.eve-ccg.com>

*Reviewer Bias: I played Eve Online for a few weeks late last year. I began playing Eve Online again right before the release of Second Genesis.*

*Eve: Second Genesis* takes the basic ideas and ideals from *Eve Online* and translates them into a collectable card game format that requires a lot of strategy. The initial set consists of 240 cards. There are two different two-player starter sets available as well as booster packs.

## From the back of the Box

From *The Great War – Starter Kit*

Once part of the same nation, the Gallente Federation and the Caldari State were sundered by overpopulation and ideology, finding themselves embroiled in a brutal conflict that lasted nearly a century. A tentative peace presides between the two nations today, yet the embers smolder hot as ever.

Claim outer regions of space and harvest their rich resources. Enhance your starbase and defend it by building a fleet of spaceships. Send them on missions to steal your opponents' resources, destroy their ships and ultimately destroy their starbases.

## Contents:

Two starter decks, coins and a rulebook. When you are ready to enhance your gaming experience, be sure to pick up *The Day of Darkness* starter kit as well as *Eve: Second Genesis* booster packs.

*Eve: Second Genesis* is a collectable card game created by the developers of the award winning MMOG Eve Online.

## Presentation

The art on the starter decks is a bit dark, but it is highly fitting for the game.

*The Great War* box art features a small fleet of ships heading toward a star that is cresting over the horizon of a distant planet. It looks as we are gazing up from another ship or station.

*The Day of Darkness* box art seems to feature the inside of a ship or station. The main point of focus in this illustration is a fire blazing on the floor.

The cards themselves are also, for the most part, fairly dark. Much of the art on the cards comes from screen captures that CCP had in their library. The game, being played in space, is naturally dark.

## There is still plenty more to know

Yes, I know, we already have a review on *Eve: Second Genesis* and an article on the tournament. "The game just launched, Nash. How much more could you possibly tell us?" I can tell you plenty more, as a matter of fact. I had the opportunity to sit down with Ingolfur, the Marketing Specialist, as well as Petur, Lead Game Designer for the CCG, and chat. They filled me in on a ton.

*Eve: Second Genesis* was in development for nearly two years. This is important since *Eve Online* only launched in May of 2003. That means that the CCG was being worked on only one year after the MMO launched!

Initially, the developers wanted to really mesh the CCG and the MMO. The integration of the two games fairly quickly dissolved but the strong ties remain, of course, being as *Second Genesis* draws directly from *Eve Online*.

As it turns out, what few changes that did take place in the card game took place in a short amount of time: the initial months of development. Since that point, the game development was right on track with where they wanted it and where it is today. To keep the game as they wanted it for all of those months, CCP kept the development completely in-house. This ensured the feel of the game remained the same as a stand-alone product, as well as remained true to the MMO that it was born from.

Don't think for a moment that you have seen all of what the developers have to offer, though. There were some facets of the game that were removed initially so they could be used for future expansions. I'll get back to the expansions in a bit.

In all, there were about 15 people that worked on *Eve: Second Genesis*. Mind you, not all of these people were working on the project at the same time. In addition to the developers, there were 2 people dedicated to sorting through CCP's stores of saved graphics from *Eve Online* to be used in the card game, as well as 6 artists to provide completely new illustrations for the CCG in this initial 240 card set.

The rulebook, which I love but some don't care for, was actually written in the same order and style that the game is described to new players. This makes reading the book, at least to me, very easy. I was not jumping around the book wondering what I was really reading about.

There are so many *Eve Online* in-game screenshots used in the CCG that their art gallery is nigh drained. This being the case, the future sets are expected to have 20% to 25% more illustrations. For these future illustrations, freelance artists will be commissioned. All of the cards for specific ships, as it stands now, are planned to remain screen shots.

*Second Genesis* has much more to do with *Eve Online* than the basic setting and the art from screen shots. The storylines planned for the CCG sets are to go along the same lines as the

All of the ships are seen from within space, the mineral/asteroid cards are also images of the rock from within space. When I say that these are in space, please do keep in mind that it is not all black. There are other things seen within the images such as stars, planets, nebulae, laser fire, etc. Asteroid field cards, like any other location card, have the image in the middle vertically, game text on the bottom and in-game cost/income & mineral amounts in the upper corners. Ships have their cost in the same location but have attack and defense stats in the upper left corner instead of income/mineral level. Some ships also have tabs along their sides to represent an active command or how far along they are in construction.

The front card art for the home station cards are images taken from *Eve Online* during character creation. The backside of each (the side with a better view of a station) and the upgraded starbase side, are all striking images of actual space stations in the MMO game. The art is on the left while game effect text is on the right. In the middle are numbers for some game stats – defense, income, and max number of structures.

Starbase Structures are similar in appearance to ships and locations, but max location is in the upper right (as they are locations), they feature the defense bonus that that structure provides.

Outer Region card art varies. Many of them feature ships, asteroids, and/or stations against colorful backgrounds (due to lighting effects). The card art take up the majority of these cards, but there is some in game effect text at the bottom (horizontally) while the cost is in the upper left corner and their income and max number of locations are found in the upper right.

Finally, news cards are similar in appearance to the other cards that are played vertically (ships, locations, etc.), but have only one number in a corner – their cost. Some news cards also have tabs, like ships, that show time remaining for that news card.

News and Ship cards are also similar in that they feature icons that represent which in game races can use them. Some can only be used by one race, while others can be used by all four.

## **Decks**

Each deck consists of one Home Region, three Outer Regions and however many other cards of each type you choose – Ships, News, Locations, & Starbase Structures. The starter decks each consist of just fewer than fifty cards. As with any card game, a happy balance between the numbers of cards in a deck is necessary, so as not to run out but to ensure you can get to the cards you need. Thus far, I have stuck with just under fifty but, than again, I have not modified the decks from their original configurations much.

As I mentioned above, some cards contain icons that designate which race(s) can use said card. Be sure to watch these as a deck is constructed, since only one race is played per deck. The starters have this sorted out for you, so no worries there.

Speaking of the starters and things being sorted out, there are multiple home stations included with each deck as well as more

story from the MMO. This means that we are likely to have glimpses at future CCG happenings within the MMO. It is also possible, admitted Petur, that we could have an occasional glimpse at the future of the MMO from within the CCG.

Everyone at CCP has been pleased at the reaction to *Eve: Second Genesis*. As of about one week before Gen Con Indy 2006 there were about 750 preorders from *Eve Online* players alone. These preorders were not made available all that long before that time! In fact, even before the convention, sales were already surpassing expectations.

## **What is going on to support the CCG?**

*Second Genesis* made its official debut at Gen Con Indy 2006. There were plenty of demo tables available at the CCP booth and they were almost always packed. In fact, when demos were not running, lines were forming at least an hour in advance (I witnessed this myself during one of my many trips to the CCP booth), and when they were running (which was most of the time) there were short lines of people waiting to try it out as fast as possible! Even though this was CCP's first year at Gen Con, there was talk of the game. The company heard positive comments throughout the dealers' floor, not just from attendees, but from other dealers as well.

Being as that *Second Genesis* debuted at Gen Con Indy 2006, CCP held a 'release championship' tournament that was to consist of 128 players in a Swiss double elimination style tournament. You can read Landon Winkler's account of that tournament on page XX.

The official website for *Second Genesis* is currently under development. Forums are also in the works. These forums are planned to have regular interaction from the CCP crew, unlike some game forums. Even though the official sites were not up as of the convention and the game had just been released at it, there are already plenty of fan sites available online.

## **A sneak peak at expansions**

As stated above, some things were cut from the initial release of the game so as to be included in future expansions, and that these expansions are to follow the same storyline as the MMO.

These expansions are already in the works! There is an expansion planned for the second quarter of 2007, and another expansion planned for the fourth quarter of the year. After that, the plan, as it stands right now, is to release an expansion at least every ten months, if not more frequently. It all really boils down to what the fans want. At least some of these expansions are meant to be able to be played as stand-alone sets, meaning you won't have to have the core set to play with at least some of these expansion sets. Sadly, with all of these expansions, as with any CCG, some cards will be made obsolete and phased out. Really, this is inevitable.

The first expansion has a ton of work put into it. It is slated to be a pretty large set that will be a component set to the core



than three outer regions. This is so you can customize your deck right out of the box. There are recommendations made for which you should use initially, but you can put in whichever home stations/outer regions you like so long as you follow the 1 and 3 rule.

Aside from the deck are tokens. These tokens, included with each starter set, represent Isk, the form of money used in Eve. Isk will be most likely be gained and lost each round, so these tokens need to be within reach of all players.

## Game Play

As I found very quickly from personal experience, before sitting down to play, make sure you have plenty of room. This game can take up a good deal of space.

Players build ships at their home bases. Eventually, a player will want to expand her controlled territory by playing an outer territory card. This is a new region of space. Ships will be moved to defend this region of space as well as to collect resources from it. Defense is important since other players will attack these regions so they can gain the resources from it.

Moving ships from one region to another is simple – just warp a ship as its action and it is now in that location. Initially, this is what a bit of game play will run like. It does heat up, however.

Lots of different ships can do lots of things, inside and outside of combat. Some ships are miners. A player would want to have a mining ship in a location that has a high mineral count so as to make the most from that location as possible. Some ships are combat vessels that can wait in place to ambush enemy ships as they enter the area so they can be dealt some damage even before combat begins. Others are designed to draw enemy fire and force the enemy to attack it. Many of these ship abilities come from commands. As that ships activity for the round, a command can be activated or deactivated as the payer sees fit.

Some ships have abilities that are inert and do not require a command to function. One ship makes all enemy ships spend money to activate a command, while another makes enemy ships cost more to produce. Some ships that may cost a lot but do not have great attack or defense scores may make up for their cost with these abilities.

Each ship has an attack and defenses score (though some may be rated at zero). When attacking another ship in a one on one battle, each ship attacks simultaneously. The attacker's attack score is checked against the defender's defense score, as well as the defender's attack against the attacker's defense. If one attack score beats the other ship's defense, the defending ship is destroyed. If both attacks surpass the defense scores, both ships are destroyed. Multiple ships, on either side of the battle, can attack a single ship, however, so things can add up quickly. To clear up some possible confusion, there is an excellent illustration offered in the rulebook.

After battle, all damage is gone and a new battle phase begins. Any ship can choose to withdraw from the region or attack (if the attacking player's turn, of course) as the player sees fit.

(though it is possible that the second expansion will be a stand alone set). This first expansion is themed around pirates, a frequent issue in *Eve Online*, and it was decided that it was to be code-named "Yarrr..."

## Fin

Now that you know more that you likely ever expected to know about *Eve: Second Genesis*, what are you waiting for?

If the attacker is the only one left at the end of combat and the combat was in an outer region, that region is now under the control of that player—even if it used to be under the control of the defending player. Please keep in mind that the original owner of the card does still own that card. Outer regions can go back and forth numerous times in a single game.

The real idea is to attack and destroy your opponent's home base. Once that is accomplished, the game is over.

Combat is not always as simple as my-ship-attacks-your-ship, though. News cards can be played to hamper or augment a ship. News cards are not played only in combat. Some news cards can be played throughout a turn. It all depends on the card's effects.

## **Conclusion**

*Eve: Second Genesis* is a fantastic strategy game. I don't play any CCGs anymore, but I will continue to follow this one.

Finding a good set of cards that work well together can be tough, but it can be well worth it. Also, the give and take in combat, while it can be insane, makes this game so very worth it.

I almost equate combat in *Second Genesis* to chess. Moves must be planned out in advance, one must attempt to figure out their opponent's next moves and one must accept a good deal of give and take to eventually achieve the goal. The only real difference here is that one player does not always know what his opponent has lying in wait. That is what makes this game a real challenge but what makes me love it!

There is a whole lot more to this game than what I have described. If you are intrigued by what I have said thus far, however, please, do yourself a favor and at least pick up a starter set. It is enough for two players to try the game and to learn the nuances of it all.

As a quick note to the developers: I am sorry if I butchered your names. I tried to get all of the accent marks right.

## **Scoring:**

**Archetype:** CCG – Core set.

**Body 11** (Game Mechanics): It is easy to understand, but hard to master. Just right in my book.

**Mind 9** (Organization - Rules): I found the feel of the rulebook quite nice.

**Spirit 10** (Look & Feel): I love the illustrations as well as the screen-captured art on the cards.

**Attack 11** (Value of Content): You can spend as much as you want in the end. Two decks in a starter set, though = a great deal to me!

**Defense 10** (Originality of Content): Despite being another card game, the feel is fresh.

**Health 8** (Physical Quality): They are cards. Seen one, seen them all.

**Magic N/A** (Options & Adaptability): You can build any deck you like. The absolute basic game play, of course, will always be the same.

## PoxNora from Octopi by Nash J. DeVita

*PoxNora* is a web-based videogame unlike any other I have seen. It is a blend of a miniature war game, a roleplaying game and a collectible card game where each player builds a deck of runes (cards, if you will) of various creatures (characters). Each creature has stats, abilities and effects. Each rune also gains experience and can be customized. The game is played on a battlefield where each rune, when in range, can attack another rune. As I said, this really is a minis war game, RPG and CCG all in one.

When a player registers at [www.poxnora.com](http://www.poxnora.com), he gets everything needed to play. Registration is even free! If the player decides to expand upon this initial experience, he can then purchase additional packs of runes to customize his army.

Each player has a deck of 20 runes. Each rune has its own stats, which the computer handles automatically. This is a good thing. As an ex-minis war gamer, I remember how out of hand it sometimes gets keeping track of stats. As there are even more stats in *PoxNora* to track, I'm thankful for them being calculated for me. I could never do it on my own.

The game is played like a minis war game. Each player starts the game with a shrine where he deploys his runes. When moving a mini, a grid shows where that character can move. Different characters move different distances, and some can move over terrain that others cannot. Since a player cannot see in all three dimensions, the movement grid is a nice feature. A similar grid appears when attacking. Different attacks have different ranges, so this feature again comes in handy. In traditional minis games, I always hated breaking out attack templates to see where I could attack, and I could never remember ranges for all my units.

When selecting a new unit to play, the player chooses a covered tile as if drawing from a shuffled deck of cards. This rune is then played provided the player has enough nora (mana).

Nora is generated each turn, and more can be gained or generated by capturing fonts located around the battlefield. More nora equals more resources for special attacks and for bringing characters into play. Fonts can also be used as advanced positions from which to deploy characters.

The goal of the game is simple: Destroy your opponent's shrine while defending your own.

So we've seen how the game is like a CCG and a minis war game. But I also said that it is similar to an RPG. How is that? Simple. Each character gains experience for what it does (or does not do, in some cases). This experience can be used to upgrade characters. All sorts of things can be upgraded, including stats, abilities and attacks. Be careful when upgrading, though. As a character gets more powerful, it costs more nora to play a rune from your hand onto the field as a character. A happy balance can be difficult to find.

## Plans for the Future

Currently, 230 different runes and 580 different abilities exist. Some abilities play well together. This is, of course, how one builds custom decks, and multiple decks can be saved at one time. The really nice thing about the deck system is that a player can have the same rune in multiple decks since only one deck is used at a time. One does not have to destroy a deck just to use one rune in another deck.

Currently, plans are in place to have a new expansion every other month, with about 60 new runes each. Future expansions will also introduce new game mechanics. The first expansion – named “Savage Tundra” – is scheduled for October and will include a new faction, a new map (or battlefield) as well as 60 to 70 new runes and 20 new abilities! The name was very recently decided upon, as the wonderful folks from Octopi still hadn't decided on a name while at Gen Con.

This game came about for a number of reasons. Many people can find it difficult to find other players (especially at 3 a.m.), but the Internet makes this community reachable at any time. As there are already 7,500 to 10,000 players, finding an opponent is not a problem. Also, there is no need to fight over rules. As the game takes place online, all of the rules are handled for the players.

The fan community is very positive, with a lot of player feedback. When a concern arises, there are reasons to back it up. The criticism is creative. This is a good thing, as the developers spend time on the forums listening to players and communicating directly with them.

In fact, the developers listen to the fan community so much that a number of features are currently being worked on that were requested by players. One is a tutorial so players can learn the game without having to play it against a live opponent. Octopi also is implementing bots so a player can test a new deck or strategy without going up against another player.

If you are a fan of collectible card games or miniature gaming, check out *PoxNora*. It's free to play. Also, if you don't check it out, Art, the lead developer, might cry some more. (Just kidding. He's a great guy. I was put up to writing that by an Octopi employee.)

